

THE CONSPIRATORS
OF
NEW ORLEANS;

OR,

The Night of Battle.

BY PROF. WILLIAM HENRY PECK,

FORMERLY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA.

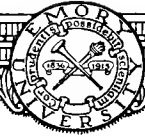
All the scenes and events of this extraordinary Romance, are comprehended within five hours. The story opens at seven o'clock in the evening, and ends at midnight—never allowing the interest or attention of the reader to flag.

AUGUST, 1863.

GREENVILLE, GA.:

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NEW ORLEANS;
OR,
THE NIGHT OF BATTLE.

BY WM. HENRY PECK.

Author of "*The Brother's Vengeance*," "*The Moctoroch*,"
"*Virginia Glencaire*," "*Red Dwarf*," "*Family
Phantom*," "*The Corsican*," "*The Baffled
Gambler*," "*Blobs*," "*Antoinette De
Burdalais*," "*Rupert's Coots*," "*The
Poisoned Almond*," "*The
British Dragoon*," &c.,
&c., &c., &c., &c.

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BY WM. HENRY PECK.

In the Clerk's Office of the Southern District of Georgia

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CHAPTER I.

“B. & B.”

IN the year 1815; the drinking saloon of Paul Amar, a lean, robust Frenchman, forty years of age, stood on St. Anne street, in New Orleans; and it was at the hour of seven, on the night of January 7th: of that year, when an aged and feeble-looking man stole into the main apartment, and sat in a chair nimbly concealed by a half-open door.

Paul Amar was trimming his lamps, when this man entered: and as he noticed his presence the bluff and rubicund visage of the wine-seller grew slightly pale, and he muttered under his heavy mustache.

“Ah! is Benditto! What can he want?—this is the tenth night of his watching for whom—whom? But it is none of my business.”

The hands of his numerous customers called his attention elsewhere, and after glancing uneasily at the stranger, he hurried his glasses and decanters.

Benditto drew his long, threadbare cloak over his face, to his knees black, and deep-set eyes, pulled his broad-brimmed hat upon his brows, and flashed a piercing glance over the rather gaudious assemblage which filled the saloon, letting his gaze pause for an instant upon every face.

“Noet,” he murmured, as he saw that the room was occupied by old and white-haired men.

In the midst of the hubbub, an old gentleman, with a long beard, as white as snow, and clad in the uniform of a hussar, placed a trumpet to his lips and gave a blare that drowned every other noise instantly.

This sudden blast of the trumpet was a sign that the trumpeter had fresh intelligence from Jackson's army, then camped a few miles below the city and awaiting the advance of the British commanded by Pakenham. Every eye and ear was then turned towards the veteran trumpeter; who shouted:

"Gentlemen, I have certain news from the American camp! Before daylight the British army will attack our friends below the city."

"Since we cannot fight with our brave sons and gallants," said a tall and stately veteran of Georgia, who had fought and conquered the English in many a Revolutionary war, "let us pray for them to the God of battles."

At this moment entered a young man, apparently little over thirty years of age, of lofty port and powerful frame, and clad in the undress uniform of an American cavalry captain.

"Ho!" said the old trumpeter. "we have it now, *one young man* left to keep the old men company."

The young man started quickly, and grew slightly red; but after a glance which changed from anger to scorn, he noted the white hair of the speaker, sat down near a small table, called for brandy, and at the same time produced pencil of chalk.

"He mistakes," cried the trumpeter: "the art is to young for brandy. Give him warm milk and if sugar, Paul."

"You are an old fool, and may sneer your fill I am on parole," said the officer. Here he seemed to scribble upon the table at random.

"You are on parole! Pardon: I did not know that," continued Valle'. "But where did you give your parole, my friend?"

"Were you not so old, I would consider your inquisitiveness impertinence," replied the officer; "but as death has its privileges, I will answer. I was taken prisoner Detroit, when Hull surrendered."

Having uttered these words, the officer drank brandy, tossed a piece of silver to Paul, faced old Valle', with supreme

contempt him and his listening friends, and then departed. A hiss of contempt followed the officer, from whom the eyes of Beditto, the man in the cloak, had not been moved during the quarrel.

The count of Beditto, after the entrance of the officer, would have attracted general notice, had not every mind been intent upon the words and actions of the latter; for no sooner had Beditto darted his keen eyes upon the officer's face, than he drew miniature from the folds of his cloak, and began to compare painted features with the haughty visage of the new comer. He gazed from one to the other, his cloak fell from his shoulders, and revealed a slender form, much bowed by age or injury. The slouch of his hat hid the upper part of his countenance, but the lower was grizzly-bearded, watered and wrinkled; while his complexion was of a corpse-like whiteness, spotted here and there with purple scars. No sooner had the officer departed than Beditto resumed his cloak, and with muffled face advanced to the counter, saying to Paul.

"Do you know that officer?"

The words were in Italian and almost whispered.

"That as it may be," replied the cautious Paul, in the same tone and tone.

Beditto placed a piece of gold upon the counter, and repeated the question.

"I know him," said Paul; his name is Victor St. John, late Cavalry Captain in the army of the North West. He resides with his uncle, General Harper, who is now in the army of Jackson below the city."

"Thank you," muttered Beditto, bowing and leaving the saloon.

"I shall hasten that corncomb," said Valle; "though he is the nepev of one of my friends. But, Paul, who is that gentleman that has just departed? He seemed afraid of showing his nose."

"That Beditto," said Paul.

"And who is Beditto, wise man?"

"Why, I suppose Beditto," replied Paul.

"That the name of an Italian fortune-teller," cried a lively old man. "Beditto, they say, is a soocerer, a wizard, in fact, a seer— But, ha! here comes a man who will fight— who is he here!"

This remark was elicited by the appearance of a ^{powerfully} built, and gaudily dressed man of middle age, with heavy beard and moustache hid his face even to the cheekbones.— He advanced to Paul and whispered:

"The Captain has been here?"

"Captain St. John or Captain Lafitte?" asked Pl.

"You know Captain Lafitte is with the army. I mean Captain St. John."

"He has just left."

"Where did he sit? at which table?" asked the other.

"There—where that chair is overturned," said Paul, pointing to the spot lately tenanted by St. John. "That is it to you, Carlos?"

"Nash that is nothing to Paul Amar," replied Mos, as he bent over the table and erased some mark with rapid stroke of the hand. "Good night, master Paul."

"But night to all such black birds," growled the wine-seller as Carlos swaggered from the saloon. "He had out something that St. John had scratched upon that table with chalk. I saw the Captain scratch upon the table—that was it? Let me see—perhaps I may get a clue to the secret.—Perhaps there is some truth in the rumor that there a plot among slaves and traitors."

He examined the table with keen and scrutiny, and though Carlos had removed every atom of chalk, Paul's keen eye detected a blur upon the polished surface, which seemed to form the inscription "B. & B." "It is B. & B.," muttered Paul, "but what does that mean? Monsieur Val, do you know that fellow who has just gone?"

"A very ugly Spaniard."

"Ugly face, uglier heart," continued Paul. "He is the worst man in all the gang of Lafitte, the Pirate."

"But Lafitte is to fight for us—pirates against bandits of the British. Think of it, my friends—the Brit have a regiment of negroes in their army and are commanded by a man whose battle motto is to be *Liberty or Death*."

"And that is it!" exclaimed Paul, placing his finger upon the letters so imperfectly erased by Carlos. "B. & B. means 'Beauty and Booty!' Ha! I smell treachery in the air."

"He means," remarked the stately, aged George, whom we have mentioned above, and who had joined the party;

“that he believes there is truth in the report that we have traitors in New Orleans.”

“Let me catch them—the rascals!” cried the trumpeter. “Traitors, friend Hartly?”

“Aye; traitors who mean to sack the city, while Packenham slaughters the Americans.” continued Hartly. “Black traitors led by white traitors.”

“Proof!” exclaimed the matter-of-fact trumpeter.

“Like Paul, there, I scent it in the air,” replied Hartly. “In times like these, such warnings, ‘though trifles light as air, are confirmation, strong as proofs of holy writ.’ You have negroes, Monsieur Valle’—watch them well.”

“They will steal by instinct,” said the old trumpeter. “I watch them at all times.”

“Stealing is a small crime, my friend, when placed by the side of murder, and the deeds of revolted slaves,” remarked Hartly, with grave emphasis. “The enemy in the field is less dangerous than the traitor in your camp. I have felt this danger which Paul fears, and love my wife and daughter too well not to be on my guard.”

“But you have negroes also Col. Hartly.”

“Every man and boy that can carry a weapon is with Jackson’s army, Monsieur Valle’,” replied Hartly.

“True, and my sons and grandsons are there,” said Valle’

“But what is this treason?”

“I have said we *know* nothing, yet we suspect much,” observed Hartly

“And I suspect that Captain St. John knows about it,” cried Paul, as the three retired apart. “I am sorry to say it, Col. Hartly, as I believe he stands high in your estimation, and in that of your daughter also.”

“Enough; he did until this night,” replied Hartly. “He is a suitor to my daughter’s hand; but if I am a judge of a maiden’s heart—Viola cares little for him. But why do you, Paul, think he knows aught of the truth or falsity of these dark rumors?” Paul had little to relate, beyond that for several days Victor St. John had held short and guarded conversations with sundry suspicious persons in the saloon—all of whom had formerly been connected with Lafite’s band of Barratarian smugglers, who had refused to follow their chief to the field. Paul then spoke of the inscription “B. & B.” written by St. John and erased by Charles.

"The same was written upon my gate, and Gen. Allison's this morning," exclaimed Col. Hartly. "It must be a password. This man, Victor St. John and his satellites must be watched."

"But by whom?" asked Paul. "All of our young men are with the army—at least all who are able to contend with the skill, cunning and courage of Victor St. John."

"Courage!" cried Valle'. "He is a coward."

"You mistake," replied Hartly. "Victor St. John is no coward. I have made man my study, and declare to you that Victor St. John is one of those men who never court danger, but when danger meets them, are brave to desperation. Is there no one fit to watch him?"

"I have it," said Paul. "Benditto is the man."

"Too feeble," said Valle', "and a base instrument to be employed by honorable men."

"He is younger and a stronger man than he appears," continued Paul. "As for baseness—why base to base, and evil to evil."

"Right," said Hartly. "Who knows where we may find this Benditto?"

"I," answered Paul. "Let me call my daughter to keep an eye to my bar, and I will then lead you to Benditto's dwelling. I have not full trust in Louis there."

"You do wrong to expose so far a daughter in such a place," remarked Hartly. "I saw Victor St. John kiss his hand, as he left the saloon this evening—and to whom? To your daughter Rosetta, who was peering through the door at the back of the bar."

Paul Amar uttered a cry of rage.

"Is it so? He, we must see to this affair at once. But Rosetta—did she respond?"

Col. Hartly paused for a moment, and then replied:

"I am a father, Paul, and would wish my friend to warn me, as I now warn you. Rosetta threw back the kiss."

"You saw her?"

"No—but I saw her shadow upon the half-open door."

"Enough," cried Paul. "Wait here, gentlemen, until I have seen my daughter—shadows are great traitors."

"He loves his daughter to madness," remarked Valle', as Paul hastened away.

“ True, and therefore I would save him from madness,” said Col. Hartly.

And now let us follow Paul in search of his fair daughter Rosetta.

CHAPTER II.

ROSETTA.

PAUL hurried up the narrow flight of stairs that led to the floor above, and placing his hand upon the knob of the nearest door, essayed to admit himself into the room beyond. But the door was locked.

"Rosetta!" he cried, striking the door firmly with his fist. "Rosetta, are you there? Rosetta, I say!"

No answer followed his impatient summons, but as he glanced along the narrow hall, running from front to rear, he saw his daughter approaching with hasty steps.

The girl was of remarkable beauty, both of form and feature, and had apparently scarcely reached her sixteenth year. Her complexion was brilliantly fair, with a tinge of rose when unexcited, but, as she met her father, a deep red blush dyed her cheeks, and then left them deathly pale.

"Why is your door locked, and where have you been, Rosetta?" asked Paul, in a voice that trembled despite his effort to keep calm.

"Is it locked?" exclaimed Rosetta, regaining her coolness as suddenly as she had lost it. "I locked it involuntarily."

"Ah! and where were you but now, my child?"

"At the rear window, father, listening to the music of the departing troops. Where should I have been?"

"Very well. Let us go into your room. I have something to say to you."

"But I hear the people below calling your name, father."

"Their wants will be attended to by Louis. Louis understands his business when I am absent, and I know mine," replied Paul, as Rosetta unlocked and opened the door.

He followed her into the neat and tastefully furnished room, and then closed the door after him.

A light was burning upon a small table near the centre of the apartment, and as Paul turned to close the door, Rosetta hurried to the table and secured a small golden locket which was lying near an open letter. Knowing that the rustling of the letter would betray her action, if she attempted to snatch it up, she threw her handkerchief over it and sat down so as to further conceal it, by resting her beautiful arm upon the table and across the handkerchief.

Paul drew a chair towards her and sat facing her, with volumes upon his tongue, but not a word upon his lips.

"Well, father," said Rosetta, "you had something to say to me."

"I have, my daughter. But first tell me—how many lovers have you?"

"Lovers! I have a score," laughed Rosetta, assuming a gaiety she did not feel.

"I have begun miserably," thought the puzzled Paul, whose blunt, straightforward honesty was ill-fitted to cope with a maiden's cunning, especially such a cunning little jade as the handsome Rosetta. "I can never learn anything in this way."

"What is it, father? You have something upon your mind," said Rosetta.

"Have you been at the bar-room door this evening, Rosetta?" asked Paul, after cudgeling his brains in a vain attempt to ask a shrewd question.

Rosetta's heart leaped to her throat, and the glance of her jet black eyes to her father's face, was as rapid as lightning.

"No, father, I have not been out of my room since supper, save to look from the window at the rear."

"Now somebody has lied, or another body has made a great mistake," thought Paul. "Still, a shadow belongs to a substance."

Then he said aloud:

"And where is Annette, the cook?"

"She left the house immediately after supper. She has not yet returned," replied Rosetta, who would have now appeared cunning with cunning, but who began to feel uneasy before plain honesty.

"Surely, Col. Hartley made no mistake," muttered Paul. "I am afraid my child is trying to deceive me. Come, I must not be beaten by a little girl like this infant. You, her mother was more than a match for me—Rosetta inherits all her mother's beauty, why not her wit?"

"Well father?" asked Rosetta.

There was a spire of defiant triumph in her voice, and honest Paul began to grow exceedingly indignant. He had sought his daughter in the garb of a lion, and now felt as if he looked like a much inferior animal, with ears ridiculously long.

"Rosetta," he exclaimed, "we are on the scent of a conspiracy."

"A conspiracy, my father?"

"A deep plot, which has for its object, the sacking and destruction of the city," continued Paul, warming with his subject. "We—"

"Whom do you mean by *we*?" demanded Rosetta.

"Why, Col. Hartly, Monsieur Valic' and I," exclaimed the wine-seller, triumphantly.

"Col. Hartly? Ah, I do not like that man."

"He is a very good man, Rosetta, and has a lovely daughter," said Paul.

"A lovely daughter! I do not think Viola Hartly lovely—in fact, she is homely," cried Rosetta, with unusual spirit.

"Ah," thought Paul, "she is jealous—for all the city calls Viola Hartly a perfect beauty. But if Rosetta is jealous she must be in love with somebody who loves Viola, and whom Viola loves. I know many young gallants who love Miss Viola, but reput is divided as regards the favored one. Some say the favorite is Henry Allison, the grandson of my old friend Valic' below, and others say the favorite is Victor St. John. Now, Rosetta does not care the shake of her finger for Henry Allison, and so can not be jealous for him. It is clear, Rosetta loves Victor St. John."

"Well, father?" asked Rosetta, growing impatient. "You are thinking. Tell me of this terrible conspiracy."

"Yes. We think we have traitors in New Orleans," resumed Paul, radiant with pride, springing from the apparent excess of his reasoning. "In fact, we are sure of it, my child. We intend to catch the rascals and hang them by the neck."

"But this does not concern me, father."

"Suppose one of these traitors, the very chief of them, were a friend of yours?"

"A friend of mine?" exclaimed Rosetta.

"A friend who loves Viola Hartly?"

Rosetta began to tremble, but concealed her agitation with a fierce effort to seem unconcerned.

"No friend of mine loves Viola Hartly. You know, father, that Viola Hartly is rich, and moves in a different circle from mine. My friends are too humble to presume to love so grand

a lady as Viola Hartly. I am the wine-seller's daughter; she is the rich man's heiress."

Rosetta spoke with much bitterness.

"She is more than jealous," thought Paul. "Rosetta is envious. I am afraid my child has a very bad heart. Jealousy, envy, and a false tongue. Ah! I fear the noble Colonel has injured me when it is too late. Ah me! can my child have disagreed me?"

Poor Paul groaned aloud, and his features assumed so ferocious an expression that Rosetta uttered a scream.

"You terrify me father! What is the matter?"

Paul rose and paced the floor with a stride that made the windows shake in their frames. He was afraid to speak, lest he should become brutal; and he loved his daughter so profoundly that he would rather have died than insult her.

Rosetta began to tremble. Paul noticed her agitation, and demanded sharply:

"You are trembling?"

"It is because I think my dear father is going mad," exclaimed Rosetta.

"Listen, my child," said Paul, forcing himself to a terrible calmness, and again sitting near Rosetta. "Your mother was the handsomest maiden in all France, when I married her, and her beauty never faded in my eyes; for she never told me a lie. She died but two years ago—see! I wear mourning for her on my head! When she died, Rosetta, my hair was as black as yours—now it is as gray as a gloomy dawn; in two years more my hair will be as white as Monsieur Vallet's. Do you recollect the last words your mother said to you, Rosetta?"

Rosetta grew very pale, her eyes drooped and her lips were closely compressed.

"You remember," said Paul, taking his daughter's tiny hand, in his, "that just before she died upon my bosom, she took your hand, thus, and made you swear to love no man better than your father, without your father's knowledge, and always to speak the truth; if not to all, yet to your father—you remember this?"

"I remember," murmured Rosetta.

"Then answer me. Have you been down to the back door of the saloon this evening?" demanded Paul; not sternly, but with the sweet cadence of a fond father's worshipping love.

"I have not," replied Rosetta firmly.

Her voice was hard and hoarse, and her hands were as cold as ice.

'The soul is appalled, when the tongue utters a deliberate lie.'

"The name of the traitor we suspect, the name of the traitor we shall detect, the name of the traitor we shall hang, is Victor St. John!" thundered Paul with sudden fierceness.

"Ah! Victor!" exclaimed Rosetta, springing to her feet and clasping her hands in terror.

The action bared the letter on the table, and Paul's heavy hand was upon it in an instant.

As he grasped it, Rosetta shrieked and swooned, sinking back into her chair with her head supported by the table. The golden locket she had concealed in her left hand till then, fell upon the floor, and Paul raised it to the light.

"Victor St. John," he groaned as he gazed upon the picture it contained. "Ah, Col. Hartly! I fear your warning has come too late. But let me read this letter, which is signed 'Victor!'"

The letter read as follows:

"My ROSETTA:—Why so coy? You know my soul is yours. Why refuse to meet me in private? Your eyes, your lips have told me that you love me; and mine—have they not sworn the same to you? Away with this foolish mistrust, my dear Rosetta. What can you fear from a heart that adores you? Prove to me that you love me by meeting me alone this night, as the clock strikes twelve, on the Place D'Armes. If you fail to meet me I will never see you again. If you consent, show a light at the rear window of your house at eight o'clock, or give me a sign if you see me in the saloon at half-past seven.

Ever thine,
VICTOR."

"Thank Heaven!" said Paul, as he gazed upon the marble-like beauty of his unhappy and unconscious daughter. "Rosetta may still be saved. I have loved gold too much since her mother's death. I have neglected my child—it is all my fault. Poor Rosetta!" He was using all his knowledge to restore her to consciousness; and as he chafed her hands and temples, and lifted her upon her snowy white bed, he murmured:

"Poor girl!" I thought she was a mere child, and behold she is a woman. It seems but yesterday when she began to prattle—and now—what dreams of love; what woman's thoughts have filled her poor heart! She spoke falsely—alas! who has not?—I must forgive her—she knew no better—it is all my fault. There—she breathes again—she revives.

—she opens her eyes—Rosetta, dear, darling Rosetta—my poor child! Pardon your father; my daughter—it is to save you from the snares of a villain that I have done this. I have read his letter, my child. The father, and not the daughter, shall meet Victor St. John.”

“Oh, my father, do not harm him!” cried Rosetta, now fully conscious. “Ah, punish me as you will, but do not injure *him*.”

“You love him so much, my child?” asked Paul, growing very stern.

Rosetta sat up in the bed, and covered her blushing cheeks with her hands.

“You, blush, my daughter,” said Paul, “and I love the sign. He is handsome—as manly a gentleman in face and form as any in America, no doubt; but in heart and deed a scoundrel. The eye of a maiden sees not the polished surface, and thinking she sees her own pure image there, dreams not of the rank villainy beneath. I cannot blame you for losing your heart to him; but Rosetta, why deceive your father?”

“Promise me that you will not harm him, father—for he is not the bad man you think him,” exclaimed the unhappy Rosetta.

“Promise for promise,” replied Paul, drawing his heavy brows into a frown. “Promise never to speak with him again—promise to tear his image from your heart as I tear it from this locket—promise to tear his image from your heart as I tear it from this locket—promise to crush your love for him as I crush this painted ivory under my heel!” continued he, grinding the precious image to atoms, and spurning the fragments from him with his foot. “Promise never to *lie* to me again, and I will spare Victor St. John, and not read him as I do this letter.”

He tore the letter to shreds and scattered them from his hand.

“I will promise anything!” cried Rosetta.

“Those who promise too freely perform but feebly,” said Paul, sternly. “Remember this my daughter—that though Viola Hartly may be a grand lady, and the heiress of a rich father’s wealth, there is a jewel that shines as fair, and is as precious in the bosom of the wine-seller’s daughter as in the crown of a queen—and men call it—*pursey*! You have it my child; keep it as your mother kept it, and let it go with you.”

to the grave—may, rather than lose it, fly with it to the grave.”

The stern dignity of his voice and attitude terrified his daughter. She murmured:

“Father, I swear to obey you.”

“I will trust you, Rosetta—and never forget that the honor of Paul Amar cannot be lost to him by his child, without calling him mad! Has Victor St. John promised to make you his wife?”

“Do you think I could become less to him or to any man?” exclaimed Rosetta, indignantly.

Paul smiled a proud smile and kissed his child's quivering lips.

“You evade my question, and so I am answered well. He would deceive you as he has others.”

“Others!” exclaimed Rosetta, standing erect and looking half-amazed. “Others! He has deceived others?”

“He counts them off upon his fingers,” said Paul, with a bitter laugh. “I've heard him many a time—and, base fool that I was, I ought to hear him—never dreaming that he aimed to place Rosetta Amar upon the tally.”

“You are resolving to make me hate him?”

“Would to Heaven I could. But, as I live, I have said nothing but truth.”

“Leave me now, my father,” said Rosetta. “I shall feel better alone.”

“Good-night, my child,” were Paul's parting words, sealed with a kiss; and as he heard Rosetta lock her door as he descended the stairs for the saloon, he continued:

“Benedict's hand shall be free to strike. My promise binds my own.”

CHAPTER III.

VIOLA.

PAUL returned to the saloon and found his aged friends awaiting him.

"Ah," said he, as he joined them, "there is no doubt of it—my child loves Victor St. John. Col. Hartly, my life and services are yours at command, in return for your kindness."

"I trust the warning has not come too late," remarked Hartly, with a significance Paul well understood.

"Had it been too late," replied Paul, with the deep tone of resolve, "I would now be as Virginius, when he slew his daughter. But enough of this; you are all my friends, and save each a daughter—let no one—"

"It is an affair too sacred for the ear of the world," interrupted Hartly, while old Valle' flushed with honest indignation.

"Then let us go to Benditto's," said Paul, "It is now eight o'clock.

"We have concluded," remarked Hartly, "that but one of us should seek him, and as you can inform us of his place of abode, either Monsieur Valle' or I will go there. If we all go our number will attract attention."

"It is true," said Valle'; therefore let me undertake the affair."

"No; I will go alone," remarked Paul. "For as I have been seen there before—at least, near there, my presence will attract no remark."

"Are you sure you can trust this Italian?" asked Hartly.

"I am; for unless my eyes played me false, Benditto hates Victor St. John."

"Shall we await your return?"

"No, gentlemen, I have engaged to meet an acquaintance at midnight," replied Paul. Then beckoning to a young man behind the bar, he said, as the youth approached:

"Louis, you must not leave the saloon until I return—though I may not return until after midnight."

Louis bowed and returned to his post. He was a tall, thin fellow, about twenty years of age, but with a cold and thoughtful expression upon his sinister looking face, that made him appear much older; with black and restless eyes, full of cunning, avarice and treachery.

Paul retired to a desk behind the bar, and, taking a pair of pistols from it, placed them in his bosom, buttoned his coat over them and left the saloon.

Col. Hartly and Monsieur Valle' soon departed, and then Louis pulled a cord which communicated with Rosetta's room, and which was a means by which Paul usually summoned his daughter to his aid, when his customers came too fast. But when Paul used it he was wont to jerk it suddenly and at random. Louis used it so that the bell in Rosetta's room tinkled inaudibly below.

A moment after the door which had betrayed Rosetta was slightly opened, and Louis whispered through the crevice, while feigning to rinse a goblet:

"Are you there, cousin Rosetta?"

"Yes—has my father gone out?"

"He has gone."

"Did he say when he would return?"

"Not until after midnight."

"Did he go armed?"

"He took his pistols."

The door was shut instantly and Louis muttered:

"She certainly seemed much agitated, and so did my worthy uncle. Ho! they have their fine secrets and I have mine. Let us await. She does not esteem Louis Dufan as he merits, and pretends not to know that I love her. My uncle would kick me into the street if he suspected it, and she knows it. But it is not from love for me that she does not let him suspect—it is because I am useful to her. Her father has many golden pieces—and I love them also. Still the gold without Rosetta, or Rosetta without the gold would not satisfy my ambition. I know her secret—she loves that American Captain. It is well. Let them go on. I will wait."

So thinking, this son of Paul Amar's half-sister, a young reprobate the humane wine-seller had rescued from the bitter struggles of a poverty-stricken orphanage, contented himself

with waiting with the patience of a spider, and pilfering from the till with the slyness of a fox.

In the meantime Rosetta, forgetting or disregarding her oath, as she dreamed of danger to Victor St. John, knew not what to do to warn him.

"If I show no light at the rear window," thought she, "he will not consider its absence a refusal to meet him, for I exchanged signals with him in the saloon. Assuredly, my father will meet him, and forgetting his promise—*en!* *his* promise? Did I not make a promise also?"

Rosetta wrung her hands in despair. "And I have no one to trust. Annette is away—Louis is jealous, and would play me false. What shall I do! My father will meet Victor and they will quarrel!—Oh, horrible—what if he should kill or wound Victor!"

It did not occur to her that Victor might kill her father!

Her eyes fell upon the shattered ivory, whereon had smiled the face she loved so well, and snatching the fragments from the floor she endeavored to arrange them, so as to restore even a trace of the handsome features. But Paul's indignant heel had annihilated the image.

"But he lives in my heart," cried Rosetta, dashing aside the pieces. "I cannot cease to love him. Why should I cease to love him? My promise! It was extorted from me!"

Then she remembered that Paul had spoken of others whom Victor St. John had pretended to love, and she paced the floor in a tempest of passion.

"Still I must warn him—I must see him once more—even if only to tell him he is a traitor. If I could *know* that he wished to deceive me!"

A timid tapping at her door startled her.

"Who is there?" she asked.

"It is Annette," replied a female voice.

"Come in Annette," said Rosetta, opening the door; and a plain, simple-faced, fat woman, some forty years of age, came in, cloaked and bonneted.

"Ah, how pale you are, my child!" cried Annette, who gave this tender title to Rosetta, as she had nursed her in her infancy.

"Am I? I am not well. Sit down, Annette. Annette, you have made but a short visit this evening."

"True; the friend whom I wished to see was not in, and so"

I came home again. But how strange you look—and I had such a dream about you last night.”

“I know—you told me of it this morning,” said Rosetta. “You love me, Annette?”

“What a question!” cried Annette. “Why, if you were my own daughter, I could not love you more than I do this very minute.”

“Will you keep a secret if I give you one?”

“A secret! This little child has a secret!” laughed Annette.

But Rosetta looked so grave that the honest woman cried out:

“Something is the matter! You are indeed ill?”

“Very ill,” sighed Rosetta.

Annette immediately turned to leave the room. She was going for a doctor on the instant.

“Stay,” said Rosetta. “I am not ill in body—but in mind.”

“Which is a dreadful sickness, my dear child—and you so happy all day. Tell me what it is, my dear, perhaps I can aid you.”

Rosetta hesitated: She needed a confidante, but feared to speak. At length she said:

“Were you ever in love, Annette?”

“Oh; my life!” cried Annette. “This infant is in love,” and Annette began to laugh as if the idea was excessively ridiculous. But Rosetta commanded her to be silent, and then told her of the late scene, and of Paul’s anger.

“Victor must not meet my father,” continued Rosetta, after telling all.

“That would be dreadful!” exclaimed Annette. “Your father would kill him! But if he is so bad perhaps it would be best for you, my child.”

“Annette!” cried Rosetta, stamping her foot. “I know he is everything that is good.”

“Yes—you think so, my child,” said Annette shaking her head. “I thought the same of my first lover—but if it had not been for a fortune-teller I should have repented it. It is true, the fortune teller was in love with me, but what he said came to pass; for my first lover had already two wives and was sent to prison for it. Don’t you trust anybody but your father.”

"Do you think a fortune-teller could tell me anything about Victor?" asked Rosetta, absently.

"Of course—they know everything," replied Annette.—
"There is one in this city—a new one, who has not been here many weeks—who can tell you anything and everything, past, present and future."

"What is her name?"

"Her name? His name is Benditto."

"Do you know where he lives, Annette?"

"Certainly, my child. I have started to visit him several times, but I was afraid to go alone and—well, I did not wish to ask any one to go with me."

"Will you go there now, with me?"

"At night?" cried Annette.

"Why not? It is a little after eight; and after we have been there we can contrive some way to warn Victor."

Annette mused in great perplexity.

"It is very wrong," thought she. "But the streets are deserted—what would Paul Amar say—what would'nt he do? But I am sure Louis is deceiving me; not that I have not still powerful attractions, but it is well to look about us. This is an excellent chance to ask after those silver spoons, and that silver mug I have missed. But what will Paul Amar say? Where is your father, my child?" she added, aloud.

"Gone out, until after midnight."

"It is wrong—but—well, no harm can come of it, I am sure," said Annette.

"Then you will go with me Annette?"

"It is the very first time I have ever thought of doing anything that might anger your father—but—well, I will go."

"Then let us be off at once," cried Rosetta; "for Benditto may tell us how to warn Victor."

"I care nothing for him," thought Annette, as Rosetta prepared for the expedition. "All I wish to know is, whether Louis Dufan is really in love with me, and what has become of those spoons."

"I am ready Annette," cried Rosetta, at length, as she completed her preparations by throwing a heavy Spanish veil over her face. "We must go out by the rear."

They left the room, and as they hurried along the hall heard the tumultuous voices of the frequenters of the saloon, which

assured them that Louis had his hands full of business below.

"No one knows that we are going," said Rosetta. "Let us haste."

They were soon upon the pavements and on their way to Benditto's; but as they crossed one of the principal streets, to enter another less imposing, a horse attached to a carriage passing rapidly, stumbled and fell, so near to Rosetta that she screamed and ran back to the pavement she had just quitted. Annette, in her own terror, fled on and gained the opposite side of the street, where she paused muttering prayers for the safety of her mistress. The night was intensely dark, but the carriage lamps enabled Rosetta to observe the efforts of the driver to raise his horse to its feet, and to whose assistance ran a man clad in uniform.

"Ah! it is Victor!" cried Rosetta, as the light flashed upon this man's face.

"Whose carriage is this?" asked Victor, for it was he.

"Col. Hartly's," replied the driver, touching his hat. "Is it you Captain St. John?"

"Cuba," cried a gentle voice from the carriage, "open the door."

"My dear Miss Viola! I trust you are not injured. Be not alarmed—Cuba will soon have the horse upon his feet again."

Rosetta tried in vain to catch a glimpse of the face of the lady in the carriage; but Victor's form was in the way, and, with her heart in her throat, she was forced to await the end of the scene.

"The horse is quite dead," said the driver.

"Ah! what a misfortune!" cried the lady. "Captain St. John, what shall I do? I received a note from our friend Miss Allison, telling me that her mother was suddenly stricken ill, and imploring her to visit her immediately, as her father and brother are with the army—"

"My life and services are ever at your command," interrupted Victor, as bowing, he kissed her gloved hand. Rosetta heard the sound of the kiss, and her jealous ears placed it not upon Viola Hartly's hand, but upon her lips.

"Ah, he has been trifling with me," thought Rosetta. "He loves—he kisses Viola!"

"But what shall I do, Captain St. John?" withdrawing her hand quickly from Victor's passionate clasp.

"Honor me, Miss Viola, by accepting my escort, either to your home or to Gen. Allison's," said Victor, in persuasive tones.

Evidently the young lady did not like this conversation to proceed further in the dark, for she cried out:

"Cuba, bring one of the lamps here, that I may see how to place my foot upon the step."

While the driver, bewildered by the accident, made several false attempts to unfasten one of the carriage lamps, Victor St. John said something to which the young lady replied:

"Captain St. John! this is no time to speak of that matter. Besides, I gave you my final answer this morning."

"You drive me to despair, Viola," said Victor, in a tone of deep sadness.

"He calls her Viola!" thought the unhappy Rosetta. "Ah, Benditto needs not tell me that Victor is perfidious!"

"Cuba, will you hurry?" exclaimed Viola, almost frightened by the eagerness of passion which gleamed from Victor's eyes, despite the darkness, and really alarmed as she detected the fumes of brandy recking in his breath.

"In a second!" cried Cuba, as he tore away the obstinate lamp and hastened to his lady; but not until Rosetta, who had drawn dangerously near, heard Victor say:

"Viola Hartly, you know I madly love you—let me hope that your answer is not final."

"It is final, sir; and I reject your proffered escort. Leave me, Captain St. John."

Cuba was now too close for Victor to venture more than a bow, which he made and turned to depart, boiling with rage, when Col. Hartly and Mons. Valle' reached the spot, on their way homeward.

"Ah—my dear father, I am so happy to meet you," exclaimed Viola, and then hurriedly related the cause of her presence there.

"I am much obliged to Captain St. John for his kindness," said Col. Hartly, in a tone of icy haughtiness, and not deigning to look at Victor, as he stood near. "I trust my daughter will never be in so unfortunate a situation as to be forced to ask Captain St. John's aid in anything."

"Why is this insult, Col. Hartley," demanded Victor.

"Are you really insulted?" asked Col. Hartly. "I saw my friend Mons. Valle', fail to insult you not long since.

But enough of this; we wish to see Captain St. John at our house no more."

"The loss will be yours and not mine," retorted Victor, with great bitterness, and hurrying away, too speedily for Rosetta to address him. She would have followed him, but feared to lose Annette, who had regained her side.

"Come," whispered Annette. "The patrol is coming this way—you know the city is under martial law."

"I have not seen her—this Viola Hartly," replied Rosetta; whose heart, though greatly wounded, took much consolation in the thought that her faithless lover was not loved by Viola. "I must see if she is as beautiful as report says she is—for, in truth, I have never seen her, save at a distance."

But Annette forced her away, and when Rosetta said she had no need for a fortune-teller, replied:

"What fickleness! What is Viola Hartly or Viola Anybody to you? Since I have been so terribly scared, and am so near Benditto's, by my faith, I'd feel like a fool to go home without learning what *has* become of those spoons! Besides, I have the password, and don't fear the patrol."

Rosetta half-stupified made no further resistance.

CHAPTER IV.

THE VEILED PORTRAITS.

IN the meantime, Benditto had reached his home, towards which he had directed his steps immediately after leaving the saloon.

While on his way thither he dexterously avoided the various patrols in his path, and instead of walking feebly, as became one of his apparent age and infirmities, sped along with rapid steps, firm though noiseless, until he reached a quarter of the city quite remote from the saloon.

The house in which he lived was an old-fashioned, two-storied edifice, built of stone and plaster many years before, when Louisiana belonged to Spain. He entered this house by an alley way that admitted him to the rear, and which led to a strong and iron-bound door fitted into the solid wall. Closing and locking this after his hasty entrance, he hurried to a small apartment in the front, and upon the ground floor, shouting :

"Mario! are you awake, Mario?"

The figure of a man lying upon a couch, and dimly seen by the dying rays of a feebly burning lamp arose at the summons, and replied :

"I am awake, Benditto."

"Then let us have more light, Mario. I have found him, Mario! I have discovered him!" exclaimed Benditto.

Mario uttered a cry of joy, and hastily trimmed the lamp. As its freshened rays shot forth their radiance, Paul Amat had he been there, would have imagined himself in the presence of two Bendittos, for Mario was the exact counterpart of Benditto in the saloon, and Benditto in the saloon the exact image of Mario in the house of the fortune-teller. But as these two men stood facing each other at this moment, one could have perceived that Benditto no longer stooped and trembled with age, though quivering with excitement, while Mario's stoop was unfeigned.

"You are certain of this Benditto?"

"I am certain of it. We have sought him thrice five years, Mario—on land and sea, in cities, towns and forests—wherever we fancied we heard of a trace. You have sought him by day, and I by night. Mario, I have found him!"

"Does he still live Beditto? Did you not drive your dagger to his heart?"

"He lives Mario; for the deeds he wrought demand a greater punishment than sudden death," said Beditto. "An Italian demands sweeter revenge than the mere death of his enemy."

"True, Beditto. And under what name and cloak does he garb his villainy?"

"Victor St. John!"

"Ah! He comes here to-night, Beditto!"

"Comes here, Mario! For what?"

"Is your Victor St. John a tall and handsome man, with eyes like flame, and a voice sonorous as a bell—and wears he the uniform of an American Cavalry Captain?" asked Mario.

"The same. He has a haughty and imperious air."

"Then he comes here to-night to pawn jewels to Beditto the fortune teller," said Mario. "I met this man this morning while on the Place D'Armes, and he asked me if I were Beditto the fortune-teller. I replied that I was. He said that he had heard that I was also a money-lender—to which I answered that I would advance money upon jewels—as has been our custom, to keep our purse strong enough for this mission of Italian vengeance. 'I have some rare jewels,' continued he, 'and need gold. Tell me when we may make a fair exchange, and I will show them to you.' 'Let it be this night,' I said; and he appointed the hour of ten."

"But there must be no mistake in this affair, Beditto. An innocent man must not suffer for the guilty. Victor St. John may not be the Henri Le Grand whom we have sworn to destroy. Come, let us go study the features of Henri Le Grand in the portrait, painted when he was twenty-two, and compare them with our recollection of those of Captain St. John, who seems scarcely thirty. For if he is but thirty, he cannot be Henri Le Grand—who, if he lives, must be thirty eight years old."

"You have a miniature painted from the portrait, Mario—so have I."

"A portrait painted from a portrait, Benditto, is but a poor criterion."

"A portrait painted upon the heart is best of all," said Benditto quickly.

"Time will fade that also," replied Mario, with a mournful smile, scarcely visible beneath his beard. "Come, we will go to the portraits."

The two old men left the room, Mario bearing the light and hastened to another and much larger apartment, furnished in luxurious style, but containing nothing remarkable, except three veiled pictures.

Two of these pictures were of the same size; but between them was third, much smaller. All were draped in black crape.

Mario drew aside the sombre veil from one of the larger pictures, and revealed the portrait of a youth in the full bloom of young manhood, whose remarkable beauty would have attracted the most careless eye.

The old men gazed upon it long and silently, their eyes flashing with passion, and their frames quivering with all the fierceness of baffled but undying hate.

"The curse of Heaven blight, if it hath not already blighted, that beauty!" said Mario, extending his arm and shaking his lean forefinger at the portrait.

"So fair an exterior! The face of an angel! The heart of a devil!" murmured Benditto.

"Victor St. John wears a moustache, and his chin is hidden by his heavy beard," continued Mario. "Henri Le Grand was as beardless as a girl—his eyes beamed with gentleness—at least so this portrait declares."

"I have seen them when they gleamed with all the cunning of the serpent!" exclaimed Benditto. "'Twas fifteen years ago in Florence when—"

"Do I know nothing of *that*?" cried Mario, grasping Benditto's hand fiercely. "Can I forget the day when assassination ended the outrage that drove me, broken-hearted, to roam this world, longing only for vengeance! Enough! What think you? Is Victor St. John, Henri Le Grand?"

"As I live I believe it," replied Benditto.

"Could he recognize this?" asked Mario, unveiling the second large picture.

"If he be Le Grand he will," replied Benditto, turning his back from the portrait and covering his eyes with his hands.

This portrait represented an Italian girl in gala-day dress, and of rare and superb loveliness. Its preëxisting expression was one of maiden innocence and modesty; and so truly had the painter portrayed the delicate blush of unspotted and artless girlhood, that one in gazing upon the glorious beauty, might have fancied the warm rich blood of conscious charms and unconscious purity, coming and going over the lifeless canvass, as the shadows of the clouds come and go over some fair field of ripe summer time.

Mario knelt before this magnificent work of art, and murmuring:

"She was perfect! Fairer form and sweeter face never blessed the home of man! Oh God!" bowed his head to his breast, and seemed to suffocate with grief.

"We must avenge her," said Benditto, in a harsh and bitter tone, as if greatly displeased. "Weep not for her, Mario—nor bless her memory. She deserted her father, her fond and doting father, for the false love of a villain!"

"She was a wife!" cried Mario, rising quickly, and darting a penetrating glance upon Benditto. "At least no finger could point at her father, and no voice say, Behold the father of an unmarried mother? and her father has forgiven her."

"I have not," said Benditto, gloomily, and gazing steadily at the portrait of Le Grand.

"I have forgiven her," continued Mario, "as she would have forgiven this one had she lived to be deceived." As he spoke he unveiled the smallest picture.

Benditto glanced but once upon the infant then revealed, and stifling a cry fell upon his knees before the portrait saying:

"Thou hast been spared much woe in dying, Clara. Pray for us!"

"Do we know that she is dead, Benditto?" said Mario sternly.

"Would it not be agony for us to think her living, Mario," replied Benditto, as he arose to his feet. "As we have buried her in our hearts, let us think she lies buried in the earth."

Mario turned his eyes once more upon the portrait of Henri Le Grand, and after a long and silent scrutiny, said:

"I am in doubt, Benditto. Victor St. John may not be the original of that portrait."

Let him be put to the trial, Mario. I know they are one and the same. You never heard the voice of Henri Le Grand. I had that criterion of identity to guide me. I heard the voice of Victor St. John as he passed me not long since, one dark and stormy night, in the street, and heard him say, 'Come, we will meet them as usual at Paul Amar's drinking saloon.' The next instant I lost him in the pitchy darkness, and for ten nights I have waited and watched in that saloon, listening to hear that voice again that I might see the face of its owner. Until this night I waited and listened in vain. Mario, the voice of Victor St. John is the voice that once spoke so fatally for that maiden, from the lips of that portrait's original. But let him be put to some trial."

"Agreed," said Mario. "But hark! there is a knocking at the street door. I will attend to the call. It is perhaps some fool coming to have his fortune told."

"It may be St. John."

"It is too early," replied Mario, glancing at a clock upon the mantel. "Do you prepare for St. John's coming."

"I shall contrive a test," said Benditto, with vehement bitterness, "that shall wring his heartstrings to an agony of fear and remorse, if he is Henri Le-Grand; and of that I have no doubt."

Mario left Benditto in the portrait-chamber, and taking a lighted lamp from a table in the hall strode, with a long and measured stride, to the street door.

As he opened it Paul Amar demanded in a voice distinctly audible to Benditto above:

"Is this the house of Benditto the fortune-teller? Ah! you are here, Benditto."

"Enter," said Mario, to whom Paul Amar was totally unknown. "Follow me."

He led the way into the apartment, where he was lying when Benditto came in, and placing the lamp upon the table said:

"Be seated; I will return in a moment."

"Be speedy, for I have urgent business elsewhere," remarked Paul.

"So have I. You must be patient if you wish to learn your fortune," remarked Mario.

"My fortune! Bah! I am not an ass nor a fool, friend Bénditto, to believe in such nonsense," laughed the bluff-spoken wineseller. "And poh! if you were as wise as fortune-tellers should be, by my faith, Bénditto, you would know that my business with you is more important than to ask for such trash."

"Be patient, Francis George!" said Mário, in a deep and warning tone.

"Ah! Rascal! Who calls me Francis George?" exclaimed Paul, leaping from his chair.

His face, usually so red and plump with the juices of the grape and the pulse of health, was now pallid and shrunken with terror. His teeth chattering and his eyes seemed starting from their sockets.

"Who are you that dares call me Francis George?"

"I am Bénditto, the fortune teller, and will be with you in a moment," replied Mário, leaving the room.

"Am I awake or dreaming," exclaimed Paul, as he sat down and wiped his face, which seemed covered with beads of ice. "But neither Francis George nor Paul Amar is afraid of Bénditto the fortune teller. If he tries any tricks upon me, life of my soul! I'll crush his ugly head like an egg shell."

Mário hastened to the portrait chamber, and was met by Bénditto, who said:

"I must see this man."

"Who is he?"

"Paul Amar, the wine seller."

"No. I will learn his business," said Mário, firmly. "His true name is Francis George. This knowledge gives me an advantage which may be of use to us. Be ready to use the necromatic apparatus as I signalize."

"I will be ready," said Bénditto.

Mário descended to Paul.

"State your business, Paul Amar," said Mário as he closed the door.

"Ah you have changed my name? That is right. But as you are so very wise, tell it yourself."

"You doubt my power," observed Mário, with assumed severity. "Behold the man you fear most of all living men."

He struck the table with a small mallet and a black curtain which hung upon the wall opposite to Paul was drawn aside by some invisible means. Another signal was given, and after a

ause a spectre seemed to rise from the recess revealed by the withdrawal of the curtain.

"Ah! Napoleon!" cried Paul.

Another signal from the mallet and the spectre vanished.

"Now behold the deed that banished you from France and made Napoleon your enemy," said Mario striking the table.

Paul gazed into the gloomy recess and beheld two phantoms in fierce conflict. One was clad in the uniform of a French grenadier, and the other in that of a Captain of Lancers. As the sword of the soldier seemed plunged to the hilt into the bosom of the officer, Paul uttered a cry of horror.

The mallet again struck the table, and the black curtains swung across the recess.

"Are you satisfied Francis George?" demanded Mario.

"It was a fair and manly combat," *Beneditto*," replied Paul, drawing a long breath.

"But its result would have executed the private soldier who slew his superior, had not the soldier fled from France after killing one of Napoleon's favorite officers," said Mario.

"It seems you are wiser than I supposed," remarked Paul. "I am not sorry that the rascally tyrant is dead, friend *Beneditto*; but sorry that I cannot wash my hands and say, 'There is no human blood on thy honest hands, Paul Amar.' He was the only man I ever killed, save in the heat of battle, and then 'twas for the glory and defence of France. But enough of this—call me Francis George no more. I am here to ask your aid."

"In what, Paul Amar?"

"In playing the spy, *Beneditto*."

"Upon whom?"

"That gentleman whose name I gave you not long since: Captain St. John."

"What! Victor St. John," exclaimed Mario, scarcely able to restrain his wonder.

"The same. But thunder! What art thou saying?" cried Paul. "You must kill the rascal—kill him this night as the clock strikes twelve."

"Kill him!" said Mario. "Why, but this instant you were murmuring over the fact that you have blood upon your hands, and now you would deepen the stain!"

"Aye, friend *Beneditto*," exclaimed Paul, dashing his fist upon the table. "For it seems no crime to knock on the head

a rascal that wishes to play Don Juan, and write my daughter's name upon his list of ruins?"

"Ah! Is it true?" cried Mario. "But why not rid the world of the scoundrel yourself?"

"Because I am an easy hearted fool, Benditto. Because my daughter has bound me by a solemn promise not to lay my hands upon Victor St. John—upon the condition, on her part, that she shall never speak to him again. Thunder! I find myself wishing Rosetta may break her promise, and so absolve me from mine!" exclaimed Paul, smiting the table.

"Rest assured, Paul Amar, that your daughter will break that promise," said Mario, gravely.

"You think so?"

"Is she not a woman—does she not love him?"

"Two facts between which the devil will play his pranks!" cried Paul. "It is clear that I had better get the start of Rosetta, and in breaking my promise break the rascal's neck."

"But why come to me, Paul, to ask me to remove this villain, when you must know a score of ruffians, black or white, who for a piece of gold will gladly kill their own fathers?" asked Mario, bending his keen black eyes upon the bluff visage of the wine-seller.

"Friend Benditto," replied Paul, "you flatter me. My acquaintances among the agreeable gentry you mention are all invited to the little feast that Jackson is cooking up for Backenham. There are, it is true, many ruffians ready enough to take pay for murder, but I need a man that will use his knife of his own accord, when a chance offers."

"Ah! Come: you are hinting something very absurd. Explain," said Mario, sitting down, and frowning.

"You understand, Benditto. You hate Victor St. John."

"I! Why should I hate him?"

"That is a nut for your own teeth, friend Benditto," replied Paul, bitterly. "Perhaps he has written your daughter's name on his list."

Mario sprang to his feet and uttered a loud cry.

"The cry was echoed in the curtained recess. Marie stared in wild amazement at the wine-seller.

"Good!" cried Paul. "I have paid you on the knuckles for calling me Francis George! Come. I think I shall thrive as a fortune-teller. Sit down again. We are even now, and I shall mind my own dish of soup. I have another reason to

think it would be a benefit to society to put an end to Victor St. John."

"Another reason? Let us hear it."

"I have cause to suspect that there is a plot on foot to sack New Orleans—a conspiracy to burn, pillage and slay us patriots—and that this fascinating rascal is one of the ring-leaders. Ask your phantoms in there if it is not true. Ask them why 'B. & B.' is chalked upon the gates, doors and tables of respectable citizens. In fact, upon the respectable door of Benditto, the respectable fortune-teller."

"Upon my door?" exclaimed Mario.

"As I entered, friend wizard, I saw 'B. & B.' chalked upon your door—go look. Your lamp revealed it." Mario was about to take the lamp from the table when Paul cried out:

"Halt! Are you about to leave me in the dark with your confounded phantoms!"

"It does not matter, said Mario. "If it is there it will remain there."

"Very true, Benditto, and now listen."

Here Paul related all that had passed in the saloon that night.

"Leave the affair in my hands," said Mario, as Paul concluded. "He shall be baffled. The city shall be protected, and your daughter also."

"I am able to take care of Rosetta," remarked Paul. "Shall we meet him at twelve?"

"I repeat—leave the matter in my hands. Victor St. John will not be on the Place D'Armes at twelve to-night."

"Ho! you will prevent him."

"I will take of him," said Mario, almost ferociously.

"Good! Then I will go home," observed Paul. "Here is gold—"

"Keep it. In this case I will work without pay."

"There! I see that I have much penetration—in fact, sagacity. Good luck—"

The heavy brazen knocker at the street door began to sound.

"You have another visitor," remarked Paul. "As I have no wish to be seen here, take no light into the hall, and as this one comes in I will go out." Mario complied; and as Paul Amar left the house, two females entered deeply veiled.

when such a woman loves, her love is a frenzy which makes the lover a god until his perfidy proves him a demon—Mario, whoever that girl may be—and I cannot dream that she is your grand-child—I pity her if she shall live, thinking she has lost a noble heart by cruel fate; or if she shall live, to be crushed by learning his baseness.”

“He shall never harm her,” said Mario. “But that Victor St. John is her father I do not believe; and if he is, she shall never know it.”

“You are too hasty in believing that she is your grand-child, Mario. You have leaped to the conclusion with no grounds to go upon, save what seems to you a most extraordinary resemblance by instinct—for if she is your grand-child, am I not of closer kin?”

Mario rang a small hand-bell, and the attendant, Yadak, appeared.

“Bring me my box of water-colors,” said Mario.

“It is here,” said Yadak, who was taught to reply in words when words were spoken, though in the profession of fortune-telling it was ever his part to play the mute.

He went to a small secretary and opening it gave Mario a box of paints. Mario prepared a brush for use, and then said to Benditto, as he approached the picture of the Italian girl

“Avert your eyes for a moment until I shall have made a change in this portrait.”

“Willingly,” said Benditto, as he paced the floor.

“Now look,” cried Mario, after working upon the picture for several moments, during which he had changed the entire expression of the features by a skillful use of the painter’s art. Benditto raised his eyes to the picture. The features were distorted with passion, the complexion pale as paper, the locks disheveled, the brows drawn from their delicate arching into a frown.

“It is Rosetta—as she looked when she cried, ‘Tell me! Does he love Viola!’” exclaimed Benditto, recoiling in dismay. “Great Heaven. Rosetta is—”

“My grandchild!” cried Mario, ere Benditto could articulate another word. “I have seen the Italian girl at the same paroxysm of passion—it was not many years ago when I threatened her with a convent, and her lover with death if I should hear they met again. And is it not strange that I have never seen that lover?”

brilliantly illuminated seemed to float from the dark distance until both read this inscription, in deep scarlet letters:

“ROSETTA, THE WINE-SELLER'S DAUGHTER.”

“Ah, this is sorcery,” exclaimed the lady.

“We are in a den of devils!” cried the other, trembling violently.

The curtain fell suddenly and Mario said:

“Are you satisfied?”

“No,” exclaimed Rosetta, whose strong nerves were only stimulated to further inquiry. “Tell me the name of my attendant.”

The curtain rose again, and the banner again floated into view, bearing the words: “Leaa, of Strasburg!”

“False, exclaimed Rosetta. “It is Annette.”

But Annette screamed and sank into a chair, crying:

“Save my soul. all good Angels! I have not borne that name for many years! It was to serve your father, my child, that I changed my name—but I defy this sorcerer to say that I am not an honest woman with nothing upon my conscience.”

Again the curtain rose and the banner floated into view. As Annette read the inscription she screamed louder than ever. She read the name of *Louis Dufau*.

“Let us go home! I feel sick! In fact I am disgusted!” cried Annette. Then changing her mind she exclaimed. “But since you know that I have sometimes thought of that young man, tell me if he will make a worthy husband!”

Another banner floated into sight upon which was written: “He will die as he was born—a traitor.”

“I knew it,” said Annette. “Doubtless he knows what has become of my spoons.” Mario made a gesture and the curtain fell.

“Now, young lady,” said he, “return home. I divine the object of your visit. Your father will not injure Victor St. John.”

Rosetta, despite her natural hardihood, trembled violently and exclaimed:

“Are you a man or a demon?”

“A man said Mario, sternly. “Beware of Victor St. John, Rosetta, and, if you should ever see him again, shun him. Better take the head of an adder in your naked hand than give ear to the love of Victor St. John!”

“Do you know him?” gasped Rosetta. “Is he so very,

very bad? Can not a love like mine change his heart? Ah, old man, you who are so powerful, you who have so much wisdom—can you not aid me in saving him from his evil nature—if indeed he is so wicked? But it is false—false, old man! Victor is true and noble. This is some plot to force me to think him vile and base! I will not believe it! I love him—yes, though he were thrice as bad as you would force me to believe!”

Raving in a tempest of passion, the furious girl became incoherent in her cries, and Annette throwing her arms around her, struggled to calm her.

“She is lost—unless the cause of this madness is crushed,” thought Mario, as he calmly viewed the scene.

Suddenly Rosetta, with passionate gesture, tore off her veil and facing Mario cried: “Tell me! Does he love Viola Hartly?”

But Mario recoiled from the white and quivering face, with a loud and sharp cry of terror, dismay and horror pealing from his lips. His eyes glared wildly, his grizzled hair seemed to rise with the agony of sudden dread, and his very beard to bristle with wild wonder.

“Saints alive!” screamed Annette, clinging to Rosetta. “He is going mad—see how he claws the air with his hands—and snaps his teeth.”

And in truth Mario’s visage presented a terrific spectacle. He seemed suffocating with some word that rattled in his throat and foamed upon his lips. He strode with outstretched arms towards Rosetta. She retreated, appalled at his glaring eyes and glistening teeth; with her beautiful but terrified face turned towards him, as white as the lace of her collar, while Annette, true to her love for her foster-child sprang between.

Mario gasped, threw up his arms and again that loud, sharp cry and fell headlong backwards to the floor.

“Ah! he is dead! Benditto is dead!” exclaimed Annette; but glancing towards the black curtain, which rustled as it rose, she saw the real Benditto, the living counterpart of him upon the floor, peering from the recess, his eyes flashing with astonishment.

“Look! See!” cried Annette, “there are two Benditto’s! Mercy! Come, my child! We are in the lair of Satan!” and grasping the waist of the bewildered Rosetta she dragged her from the room into the hall, then to the street door—

unlocked it and rushed into the street with a speed now rivaled by that of Rosetta, who fled with her, hand in hand until the house of the fortune teller was many squares behind them.

"I must catch breath, my dear child," gasped Annette, as she sank exhausted upon a gate step. "Ah, what an adventure."

Rosetta made no reply, but upheld till now by the strength of fear, dropped on the pavement as senseless as the stones beneath her.

"Saints of Heaven!" cried Annette, springing to the prostrate form, and striving to raise it in her arms. But her recent race of terror had made the strong woman as weak as a child.

Tearing off her cloak, rolling it into a pillow, and placing it under the head of the unhappy girl, Annette tried to open the gate of the flower garden that barred her approach to the house to which it belonged.

The gate was locked, and the deep growl of a monstrous dog, guardian of the place, warned Annette of the presence of the savage beast within. But the noble-hearted woman surged all her weight against the gate, sprung its hinges loose, and darted up the shelly walk, nor paused until she clamored at the house door.

The occupants were slow in responding, and the dog, excited to fury by the invasion, made ferocious leaps to break the chain which bound him in his kennel.

"Open! In the name of Heaven open!" screamed Annette, striking the door with hands and feet.

At length the door flew open, and Annette found herself confronted by a beautiful young lady, whose firm eye and resolute face proved her able and ready to use the carbine she grasped in her steady hands.

"Pardon!" cried Annette. "Oh come to my child! She is dead or dying at your gate! Come quickly."

By this time several female servants and one or two aged negro men, had hurried to the spot, staring in open-mouthed wonder at the intruder.

"Bring lights," said the young lady to the servants, in a calm and melodious voice. "Good woman, calm yourself—we will do all in our power. Hasten, Jane—give me that candle—come with me, John and Robin—lead us to your child, good woman."

“Ah she is not my child in truth,” said Annette, as she followed her, “but my foster child, the only child of Paul Amar, the wine-seller. Perhaps she has simply swooned.

“Carry her into the house,” said the lady, as the servants gathered around the unconscious Rosetta. “She lives—she will soon revive—take her into the saloon and place her upon the nearest sofa.”

These orders were delivered rapidly, but with admirable coolness, though the young lady was pale and her eyes flashed with excitement.

Her commands were quickly obeyed and the lady asked: “How did this happen?”

“It is too long a story to tell now,” replied Annette, chafing Rosetta’s hands and temples. “We have been terribly frightened by a hideous old man.”

“She is exceedingly lovely,” said the lady, as she aided Annette, “and very young. Ah, she opens her eyes—what beautiful eyes.”

Rosetta recovered her senses almost as quickly as she had lost them, and her eyes glanced from face to face, until they paused in sudden wonder upon the angelic beauty of the young lady near her.

The lady was in the full flush of young womanhood, not more than twenty years of age; tall, dignified and superbly developed; with grand blue eyes, gentle and brilliant; massy locks of a deep brown that seemed jet black by the fire light, and a face and form of rare and dazzling loveliness, pervaded by an expression of the purest ingeniousness and benevolence.

Rosetta gazed for an instant upon this vision of heavenly beauty as if entranced, and then springing to her feet exclaimed:

“Viola Hartly!”

“I am Viola Hartly,” said the lady, in a tone of softened wonder at being addressed by name by a stranger. “I am happy to have been of service to you, my dear friend. You are too weak to go home—remain here till morning.”

“Is this your house?” asked Rosetta, in a trembling voice.

“No—but the house of a dear friend, Miss Allison, who will rejoice, as I do, to be of service to you, replied Viola.

“Of service to *me!*” exclaimed the haughty and mortified Rosetta. “Viola Hartly can never be of any service to Rosetta Amar. I would rather have died upon the street than

have had this mortification. Come, Annette, let us go home or I shall go mad with shame."

"My dear child," began Annette, as Viola drew back from Rosetta's flashing eyes and contemptuous gesture.

"I say come, before I die of shame! To be found in the street at night is bad enough—but to be found by Viola Hartly! Come!" said Rosetta, dragging Annette away, and flashing back Viola's astonishment with glances of jealous hate.

"I know not, young lady, why you address such words and looks to me," said Viola, growing cold and stately as an insulted queen; "but hope there is some great mistake."

"There is no mistake in my feelings towards *you*, Viola Hartly. For all your wealth and station, I think myself not at all happy in having made your acquaintance."

"You have not made my acquaintance," retorted the insulted Viola, with calm dignity, as Rosetta left the house with the bewildered Annette, who began to expect that the end of the night's adventures would be a volcano or an earthquake—perhaps a deluge!

Her tongue would have rattled all the way home, if Rosetta had opened her lips, but Rosetta said not a word, and honest Annette was one of those amiable dames who become mute as mice—when no one replies to them.

Upon reaching her father's house, Rosetta dismissed Annette to bed, and retiring to her room locked herself in. But not to sleep, for she had not warned Victor St. John of the impending danger, and her resolution grew stronger as obstacles rose to oppose her.

Annette retired to her bed, muttering to her uneasy pillow:

"After all, I have discovered nothing concerning those spoons."

CHAPTER VI.

THE PORTRAITS.

AS the door clanged after the precipitate departure of Annette and Rosetta, Benditto sprang from the necromatic recess and hurried to the prostrate and senseless Mario, who lay as he had fallen, apparently in the rigid embrace of death.

"Mario!" cried Benditto, raising the ghastly head, and staring upon the half-opened eyes. "Mario! speak! What means this?"

But Mario remained in the death-like stupor, until Benditto, alarmed by the obstinacy of the fit, and knowing the great age of the sufferer, sprang into the hall and struck a gong suspended against the wall.

Even while its blare of dissonance echoed throughout the house, a powerful man, evidently of Oriental extraction, with strongly marked features, hurried into the *Chamber of Oracles*; where he found Benditto supporting Mario's head upon his bosom, and pressing kisses of unmistakable affection upon the pallid brow and withered cheeks.

Benditto made a few rapid gestures and the servant, for such was his station, lifted Mario in his stout arms and bore him to the portrait chamber. There he placed the old man upon a luxurious divan, and hastened away. He returned immediately with a small chest of medicines which he presented to Benditto.

Benditto selected a diminutive vial containing an amber colored liquid, from which he let fall a few drops upon Mario's lips.

The effect was almost instantaneous. Mario heaved a deep drawn sigh and said:

"Enough! My body and not my mind has been paralyzed, Benditto. It was a terrible shock, Benditto, and my heart became as ice as I gazed upon her."

"And wherefore, Mario? Why should the face of Rosetta, the wine-seller's daughter, so appall you?"

"Because it was as the sudden seeing of one living whom we have thought dead many years ago, and believed buried in the earth," replied Mario sweeping his hands, which still trembled, across his eyes. "Yes, it was her living image."

"Of whom do you speak?" asked Benditto, in a tone of profound respect which did not conceal his wonder.

"Let me whisper it to you—but no—we have no listener, for Yadak has retired. She is the living image of that portrait at the same age."

Mario pointed to the portrait of the Italian girl, which was still unveiled. Benditto started quickly but recovering said:

"I cannot think but your imagination has led you astray. Surely I would have noticed it, for I have often gazed admiringly upon the beauty of the wine-seller's daughter. I can trace no resemblance."

"It is very natural, Benditto. I was the father of the Italian girl and saw much more of her, and every expression of the face, than you could have done."

"That is very true," replied Benditto moodily. "But what are you still so powerfully excited by a mere resemblance?"

"Because I believe," said Mario, rising and placing his hand upon the portrait of the child, "that Rosetta is the original of this portrait, grown almost to womanhood!"

Benditto staggered as if he had suddenly received a heavy blow upon his heart.

"I repeat it," exclaimed Mario firmly. "I assert that Rosetta is my grand-child!"

"Impossible!" cried Benditto, with an expression that seemed to doubt Mario's sanity. "Remember how Paul, the wine-seller, worships her."

"And did not everybody worship *her*?" cried Mario, pointing again at the Italian girl's picture. "Was there not a time when no man, woman or child could pass her without a word of admiration—without murmuring blessings upon her glorious beauty?"

"Say no more! Or you will drive me mad," cried Benditto. "Who can appreciate what she *was* with greater anguish than I?"

"Pardon me, my Benditto," said Mario gently. "You have lost more than I."

"Not so, Mario—but it is folly to attempt to sum up our individual miseries. Mark!—the clock strikes nine—in

another hour Victor St. John will be here. Shall he pass from here again Mario?"

"If he proves not to be Henri Le Grand, our vengeance must not fall upon him, and unless such proof shall be as clear to my mind as established fact, Benditto, we must not harm him."

"The proof will be clearly set forth," said Benditto; "unless he is a demon so heartless and inhuman, so utterly depraved that his sins of youth shall seem as virtues to him. Yet, if it should so happen that your mind remained unsatisfied, Mario, will you suffer him, though a stranger to us, to go free to destroy the happiness of Rosetta?"

Mario's eyes flashed fire, and he grasped Benditto's hand eagerly saying:

"His fate is sealed, Benditto! For if he is not Henri Le Grand, he is as great a villain, let him bear what name he may. Can you believe that I will suffer him to injure Rosetta whom I firmly believe to be my lost grand-child?"

"And if Rosetta should prove to be that grand-child—what then?"

"The question straggles, Benditto."

The old men gazed into each other's eyes in mutual perplexity. At length Benditto spoke:

"If she proves to be your grand-child, and Victor St. John proves to be Henri Le Grand our vengeance will deprive her of lover and father at one blow!"

"Such a father! Such a lover!" exclaimed Mario fiercely. "He must die ere this night. You do not speak Benditto?"

Benditto was plunged in gloomy thought, and paced the floor uneasily.

"Speak Benditto. You are hesitating. Have I not often told you, that when the time should come to strike this blow, you would be found wanting?"

"Not from any pity to him," exclaimed Benditto, with a vehemence so startling that Mario recoiled. "I pause not for *her*, if either your or my belief should be true."

"Ah, I was wrong to allow you to know of my belief," said Mario. "Though she will suffer no loss in either case."

Benditto gazed mournfully upon the picture of the Italian girl, and said:

"Rosetta is a woman and loves. She whose image is there could tell you, and her destiny must teach you that

CHAPTER V.

THE WIZARD.

AS PAUL left the house of the fortune teller, Mario allowed the two veiled ladies to enter, and leaving the door open said: "Pause here for a moment," then returned to the small apartment, whence he re-appeared bearing a lamp.

"I wish to examine the door," he remarked as he raised the light above his head. One glance satisfied him. Near the brazen knocker was the mysterious inscription, "B. & B."

"Follow me, ladies," he continued, after closing the door, and led his visitors into the "*Chamber of Oracles*," as he termed the small apartment.

This room, we have omitted to state, was lit up in deep black, thickly carpeted, and contained a single round table, fantastically painted, a couch and a few chairs.

"Be seated, lady and lady's servant," said Mario. "You have hidden your faces, but your hands are ungloried."

One of the visitors uttered a cry of surprise and hid her fair and scorched hands in the folds of her dress. The other still farther revealed her snowy, tiny hands, and said boldly:

"You are very wise, sir wizard. Can you tell us the names of your visitors?"

"Such trifles are unimportant in the workings of the noble science of astrology," young lady.

"Why, young lady?"

"Your voice is not disguised," said Mario.

"You are shrewd; but not wise enough to tell me my name," observed the lady.

"Perhaps," replied Mario, striking the table.

An invisible bell sounded thrice. The black curtain again arose, and the dismal looking recess was seen.

"Gaze into that gloom," said Mario, in solemn tones, "and if those who serve me deem you worthy, they will declare your name."

The ladies turned their eyes upon the recess, and a banner,

"You have seen him, but ignorantly," said Benditto. "You will see him to-night, and I will prove Victor St. John to be he. But erase that resemblance—I do not like to see the portrait so disfigured."

Mario shook his head mournfully, and asked:

"You cannot love Rosetta?"

"I can love nothing—have I not lost all?—Rosetta can be nothing to me unless—" He paused.

"Go on," said Mario.

"Unless Paul Amar should say to you, 'Rosetta is not my child'—and that is an impossibility, for Paul Amar lives in the light of her eyes."

Benditto was playing a difficult part, for his breast heaved, and his breath was short and thick as he spoke.

Mario took a sponge from Yadak's hand and quickly restored the beauty of the disfigured portrait.

"For the time," said he, after veiling the three pictures, "let us drop this painful subject, and speak of the strange inscription upon our door. You heard Paul Amar speak of it. I must confess that I know nothing of it."

Before Benditto could reply, the clamor of the brazen knocker sounded through the house.

"Go show the visitor to the Chamber of Oracles," said Mario to Yadak.

The attendant departed and Mario continued:

"This inscription puzzles me, Benditto. We must learn its meaning, and way it is inscribed upon our door. For we, who pretend to read hidden things, should know if aught threatens us."

"Very true, Mario. I have noticed the mysterious inscription during the last few days, and the thought now occurs to me that 'B. & B.' is not inscribed upon the houses of the poor."

"Ah! Then why upon ours?" asked Mario.

"Because Benditto is believed to be a very rich miser as well as a cunning fortune-teller."

"So-so. But why is the inscription found in the drinking saloon of Paul Amar, who cannot be very rich, Benditto?"

"If not in gold he is very wealthy in the beauty of Rosetta," replied Benditto.

Mario leaped to his feet, with a stifled cry of horror.

"Then," said he, in a deep whisper, "you think the inscription cannot be found upon buildings which do not belong to the rich, or to those who have beautiful daughters?"

"You have said it. I believe it," replied Benditto, gravely. "When a plague rages in a city men mark the doors of infected houses that passers-by may avoid their contaminating vicinity. When a great plot is growing to bloody completion the conspirators secretly mark their intended booty and victims.

The street door grated upon its hinges, and Mario made a gesture which warned Benditto to listen.

Both approached the door of the portrait chamber and leaned forward into the hall, so as to harken to the voice of the visitor below.

"Is this the house of Benditto, the fortune-teller?" were the first words.

No doubt Yadak, playing the part of a mute, signified in gesture that it was; for he was immediately heard leading the visitor into the Chamber of Oracles.

"It is Louis Dufau," whispered Benditto. "Paul Amar must have returned to the saloon, and given his bar-tender an hour of leisure. I will attend to him. Like most villains, he is superstitious."

Benditto left the apartment as Yadak appeared from below, and was soon in the presence of Louis Dufau.

"He is frightened," thought Benditto, as he noticed the ill-concealed agitation of the young man. "Be seated," said he aloud. "Speak boldly, what do you desire?"

"Fortune," replied Louis boldly, as he recovered from his trepidation. "I wish to know how I may obtain it?"

"By industry, honesty and perseverance," replied Benditto.

Louis laughed sneeringly, and placed a small golden coin upon the table, saying:

"All rich men pretend that they have gained their wealth in that pious and virtuous manner; but I doubt it. Besides, I may live a thousand years and still be poor if I have no surer means."

"Why do you place that coin upon the table," demanded Benditto.

"Gold creates gold," replied Louis. "Take it and tell me how I may become suddenly rich."

"You ask an impossibility," said Benditto. "No man becomes suddenly rich, unless by marriage, or inheritance."

Louis' eyes flashed with joy and he asked:

"Is it my fate to so become rich?"

"Not if you steal, lie and scheme," replied Benditto. "Robbery leads to murder."

"You dare accuse me of such baseness!" cried Louis, springing to his feet.

"Answer me, young man," said Benditto, fixing his eyes sternly upon Louis' pale face. "When did Paul Amar give you this coin."

"That coin? He does not give me gold—he is miserly to all, save to his daughter Rosetta. I have had that coin—why—at least five years," stammered Louis.

"I gave this coin to Paul Amar not three—two hours ago," said Benditto. "I recognise the date, 1783, and because I marked it with a secret stamp—'B. & B.'"

"Ah—I have made a great mistake," exclaimed Louis, drawing another coin from his pocket—there—that is the one I have had five years. You see—"

"That you are lying," said Benditto, as he examined the second coin.

"You're an old man, or I would thrash you soundly for your insults," cried Louis. "What proof have you that I am lying?"

"You say you have had this coin five years?" asked Benditto, holding up the second piece.

"I will swear to it. But what is that to you? I came here to ask questions and to pay for civil answers. You use my coming to insult me."

"What year is this young man?"

"What year? 1815," replied Louis.

"This coin bears date 1814," said Benditto. "It is but one year old."

"If you find fault with it give to me, old man. I was a fool to come here—I should have gone on about my business—here, give me the gold."

"It seems to me you have too much gold to have come by it honestly," said Benditto, paying no attention to Louis' outstretched hand.

"That is none of your business," cried Louis fiercely. "Give me the coins. You said that you marked one of them."

—you lied, old man, for that coin was marked in my presence this day.

“Was it? And what does ‘B. & B.’ mean?”

“What is that to you? Give me the coins—what a fool I was to come here—give me the coins, or, old thief, I’ll take them.”

“Take them,” said Benditto, tossing the coins upon the table. “And now let me warn you, young man. You have a kind-hearted uncle; who, though somewhat avaricious, remembers that it is his duty to give shelter and aid to the child of his sister. You came here to me prompted by a whim, born of your belief in my power to read the future. By your coming I have learned that which I have suspected from the very first time I saw your face in the drinking saloon. You are dishonest, treacherous and a liar. I am old, and speak plainly. What game is this you are playing? Whatever it is stop at once. Go home and strive to be honest, Louis Dufau. You are not twenty years of age, but you are old in evil.”

“Many thanks for your sermon,” sneered Louis, as he pocketed his gold. “I think you are a Jesuit turned fortune-teller—go back to the old trade and try to convert heathen. I will remember you in my prayers, but whether those prayers shall beg blessings or ask curses I leave you to judge. Show me out, old impostor—what a fool I was to think you could tell me anything I do not know already.”

“Go—tread carefully, young man,” said Benditto, as he closed the street door upon his chance visitor.

“Yadak,” he continued, as met the attendant in the hall, “Follow that young man. Be his invisible shadow and report all you hear and see.”

Yadak hastened away, and was soon upon the path of Louis Dufau.

Benditto returned to Mario in the portrait chamber.

“Look at that,” said he, giving Mario a small piece of wax

“It is an impression of the coin, which bore the same inscription,” remarked Mario.

“And doubtless the coin is Louis Dufau’s passport among the conspirators—for doubtless there is a conspiracy,” said Benditto. “Come let us search for a coin in our treasury, of the same date.”

“And having found it, what then?” asked Mario.

“I, or you, will use it as a passport, after inscribing ‘B & B.’ upon it,” replied Benditto. “I have changed my mind—we must let Victor St. John pass from here alive—though he should prove to be Henri Le Grand.”

“I understand,” said Mario. “We are to follow him to discover more villainy. We will look in our treasury.”

The old men left the portrait chamber.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ABDUCTION

BENDITTO and Mario left the portrait chamber and proceeded to a small apartment, the bed-chamber of the former.

The room, though small, was more like a lady's boudoir than the bed chamber of an old man; and its furniture was of the same magnificent suit as that which garnished the saloon of portraits. That delicate air only to be found in the elegant appointments of some fair beauty, or lady of refined taste, pervaded the apartment, and the rich, deep, carpet of velvet gave back no echo to the tread of the old men.

Yet this was Benditto's bed chamber. Gazing around upon the scene one would have said, the delicate hand and taste of woman had left their gentle traces throughout; but no person inhabited the house of the fortune-teller save Benditto, Mario and Yedah—a fortune-teller, a wizard and a pretended mute.

After entering the room, Benditto opened a small door imbedded in the wall, and so concealed as to be unsuspected of existence. From the little recess within he drew three steel-bound caskets. Two were filled with golden coin, the other with jewels.

Rumor had not lied. Benditto was rich, but Benditto was not a miser.

Having placed the impression before them, the old men each took a casket of coin and began to search for a *jac simile* of that which Louis had first given to Benditto—Spanish, and dated 1783.

While they are so engaged let us return to Viola Hartly.

After the departure of Rosetta, Viola dismissed the wondering servants to their rooms, and retired to the apartment occupied by Mrs. Allison, the mother of the young lady whose urgent note had summoned Viola from her home.

Harriet Allison was a timid and gentle girl of an exceedingly nervous temperament, far different from the courageous nature of her father and brother, who were then with Jackson's army

When Annette clamored at the door Harriet, already greatly excited by the serious illness of her mother, was so alarmed as to be incapable of moving hand or foot, while the braver Viola sprang to ascertain the cause of alarm, and armed herself to meet danger by snatching a carbine from the stack of arms, provided by the absent father and brother for the defence of the household.

When Viola returned to the chamber of the invalid she found Harriet soothing the fears of her sick mother, as one of the servants had told of the cause of the disturbance.

"Ah Viola," said Harriet, "I am glad you have returned. Mother has taken an idea that Packenham's army has attacked the city, and is half dead with fright—indeed I am but little better. Had I as much courage in my whole body as you have in your little finger, Viola, I should be a heroine."

"Perhaps I was as much frightened as you were, Harriet," said Viola, as she drew near to the bed-side. "For I thought a worse calamity than Packenham's troops was upon us."

"You refer to that dreadful rumor of a conspiracy to sack the city," remarked Mrs. Allison. "Ah, me! I have often pored over history and felt a strange delight in reading of war and sieges, but I little thought it would be my destiny to be in the midst of such cruel alarms. Would that my husband and son were here."

"We have brave defenders who will repulse the foe," replied Viola, "and I have little fear for the result. Even should Packenham gain the victory. I do not think the city will suffer as many suppose."

"Ah, Viola," cried Harriet, "you do not know what British soldiers are in the flush and rage of victory. You know our friend, Mrs. Blank, has a wounded English officer at her house—he was captured a few days ago. Mrs. Blank asked him this morning if he thought there would be any injury done to the women of New Orleans, should the British gain the city. He hesitated for a time, and then said: '*Madam, I advise you to be prepared for instant flight after Gen. Packenham's victory—I cannot answer for the humanity of our troops!*' Think of that warning, dear Viola."

"It is time to give the medicine to your mother," said Viola, wishing to change the conversation, which was becoming terrifying to the invalid.

A cry of dismay escaped her, as she glanced towards the

table where the medicine had been. The table was overturned, and the medicine lost upon the floor.

“What shall we do?” said Harriet. “The doctor said the medicine must be given every half hour until morning—and now there is none in the house.”

“Fortunately we have the prescription,” replied Viola; “and as the drug store is not far off, we will send one of the servants for it.”

“I fear you cannot persuade one of them to leave the house,” said Harriet. “They are afraid of the patrol.”

“And we have not the password,” remarked Viola. “I must go myself.”

“You! Oh Viola!” exclaimed Harriet. “The patrol will arrest you—you know they arrest everybody now that has not the countersign. Ah, what shall we do? Oh that father or brother would come!”

The invalid, who heard nothing of all this, seemed in great pain, and moaned continually.

“I *must* go, dear Harriet,” said Viola, though pale as she thought of the dangers of the street. “See in what pain your dear mother is—and the medicine had such a soothing effect—she was certainly improving before this late alarm at the door. No, I will go alone, Harriet,” she continued, as Harriet arose to accompany her. “You must not leave your mother. Do not be alarmed; I think the patrol, if I meet them, will not detain the daughter of Col. Hartly—and now I think of it I heard my father give the password as we came here after the accident to the carriage. It is ‘*Chalmette*.’ Before I go tell me—do you know any one named Rosetta Amar?”

“Rosetta, the Wine-Seller’s Daughter,” exclaimed Harriet.

“That is the person, do you know her?”

“I have heard of her—she is the belle of her circle, and her father is famous for his love of her and for his pride of her beauty.”

“Yes, she is very beautiful,” said Viola, as she threw on her cloak.

“And much admired by a discarded admirer of yours,” continued Harriet.

“Ah, whom can you mean?” asked Viola.

“Captain St. John—at least I have often heard him praise Rosetta’s charms,” answered Harriet. “You know Captain

St. John thinks he is a great lady-killer, and is always boasting of his triumphs."

"He has never dared to boast of such to me," said Viola, haughtily.

"Because he hoped to win your heart, Viola. It would be poor policy in a lover to boast to one lady of having stolen the heart of another," replied Harriet, smiling. "Of Rosetta he has never said more than that she adored him."

"Ah, indeed!" exclaimed Viola, and then thought—"Poor Rosetta, she loves Capt. St. John, has heard that absurd report that I loved him, and is jealous of me. Yes, that accounts for her strange conduct; and in truth her pride must have been much enraged—still, I think she was rather spiteful."

"Be very, very careful of yourself, my dear Viola," said Harriet, as she parted with the lovely girl at the front door. "My brother Henry will never forgive me should anything happen to you."

"Give him that for me, Hattie, and he will be consoled," replied Viola, kissing Harriet, to hide her own blushes. "I shall be back within ten minutes. Return to your mother."

"Stay—one of the servants *shall* go with you—see how dark and dismal the street is," exclaimed the timid Harriet, peeping forth into the night. "Jane!"

A woman answered her call.

"Go with Miss Hartly, Jane. Miss Hartly will return with you."

"Come Jane, I feel braver for your valiant protection," laughed Viola, as she sprang into the darkness, with the frightened and trembling Jane clinging to her cloak.

The pharmacy towards which she directed her steps was not far from the house of Gen. Allison, but upon reaching it she found no one present save a lad, whose knowledge of medicines was extensive in the taking but small in the compounding thereof.

"Where is the druggist?" asked Viola, of his juvenile anatomy,

"With Gen. Jackson, a fightin' of the British," replied the weazen faced boy. "He *had* to go—and he was so skeered that he loaded his pistols with worm lozengers and primed 'em with tooth-powder."

"How far is it to the nearest drug store?" continued Viola,

"Mor'n half a mile," replied the irreverent apprentice.

and as his thoughts continued to run after his courageous master he added: "He was so skeered that he carried off the scabbard and left the sword—though its my opinion that the British'll get as nigh one as 'tother."

"Will you please direct me to the nearest drugstore!" asked Viola; and instantly regretted the question had been spoken so loud, as she turned and saw an evil-eyed, ill-looking man peering in upon her from the street.

This black-bearded fellow was he whom Paul had addressed as Carlos in the drinking-saloon.

Viola had scarcely caught sight of him than he vanished, as Jane, the servant whispered to the young lady:

"That's the man as 'scribed 'B. & B.' on our gate this mornin'."

"Do you know w' o that man is?" inquired Viola of the lady, as he accompanied her to the door to direct her on her way.

"I didn't see him mor'n a second," replied he, "but I think it was a hard customer they call Carlos the Spaniard—they say he was one of LaFitte's smugglers or pirates—I would not like to meet him alone at night, or in the woods either, if he thought I had a pistereen in my pocket."

He then pointed out the direction Viola should go, and returned to his seat behind the counter.

Viola felt her heart sink as she again entered the dismally lighted street, and her attendant begged her to hasten home.

"No," replied the noble girl, "it is very-probable that the life of Mrs. Allison depends upon taking the medicine, and I feel that it is my duty to get it if possible, even if I must seek every pharmacy in the city."

So they walked on, avoiding the darkest streets, and trembling as they now and then passed some black-looking alley-entrance. But they reached the desired spot without molestation, and having received the needed medicine started on the return.

"It is not very late," thought Viola, as she heard a clock striking nine, "and we shall soon be laughing at our terrors. Still, it seems later than nine."

They had not gone far when a lampless carriage, driven at great speed, dashed out from a dark street and wheeled into that along which they were going. But after proceeding a few yards beyond them the horses were checked into a walk,

and the vehicle rolled on at no greater speed than that of the hasty feet of Viola and her attendant.

The circumstance gave much courage to Viola, who thought its presence would be a guard from violence, if indeed any such thing was intended. Still she marvelled that they had met no patrol during that long walk.

At length, when they were half-way home, and at a spot when the street was utterly dark the carriage stopped at a curbstone near the pavement upon which Viola was walking, and she heard the driver exclaim:

"Well, I see no chance of getting a fare this night—confound the war that shuts the theatres, the saloons, and even the churches. I think I will drive to the stable, and then to bed."

The driver seemed to be turning his horses as if to go down the cross street, when Viola, alarmed by a shrill whistle not far behind her called out to him, though scarcely visible:

"My good man! Is your carriage disengaged? Is it empty?"

"That has been its luck all this week," replied the driver, checking his horses until Viola came up. "Can I be of any service to you madam?"

"Oh, yes," exclaimed Viola, rejoiced to think that a shelter from danger was at hand, for the shrill whistle was repeated again and again, behind, before, and on each side of her in the horrible darkness of the deserted streets. "Will you take us to Gen. Allison's?"

"I will drive you wherever you desire," said the driver, as he scrambled from to the ground and opened the carriage door. "This way, madam—it is very dark."

"Come, Jane," said Viola, as she sprang into the carriage. "Make haste!"

But the door was slammed to with a crash, Jane was knocked down by some one who rushed out from the darkness, and before Viola could comprehend her situation she heard the lash as it slashed the horses which bounded away at break neck speed.

"Oh Heaven!" cried Viola, clasping her hands in terror; "the driver has been attacked! and poor Jane—what will become of her! I am rejoiced at my own escape, but my heart bleeds for poor Jane."

But as the horses continued to dash on as running away,

a new fear seized her mind, until she noticed that the lash was mercilessly applied.

"Why does he drive so furiously!" thought she. "We shall be dashed to pieces!"

She strove to let down the glass windows, but they were as firm as steel. She broke the glass with her hand wrapped in her cloak, and cried out:

"Stop, driver! We are long since past Gen. Allison's! Stop—we shall be killed."

A loud and brutal laugh was the only reply, the horses dashed on and suddenly thundered into a dark and narrow street.

That cold and mocking laugh chilled Viola to the marrow. She had heard it once before. It was but two days since she had heard the same fiendish laugh, as with her father she passed a drinking saloon, a laugh so reckless, triumphant and rakish that she had involuntarily glanced into the saloon.

And now in the carriage Viola Hartly grew ashy white with a terrible suspicion as she heard that laugh again, and remembered that in the laughter of the drinking saloon she had recognized Captain Victor St. John!

Great Heaven! Could it be possible that Victor St. John was the driver of the carriage! But the driver whom she had addressed was not St. John. Then she recollected that as she sprang into the vehicle some one leaped upon the driver's seat! Could it be possible that she was the victim of a plot? Then she recalled the fierce and demon-like glare of the eyes that had stared at her when in the first pharmacy, and it flashed upon her mind that the driver who had mourned his ill-luck was that dreadful man, that Carlos, that pirate!

"Oh, it cannot be, it cannot be," she cried, as if some one was near. "Captain St. John cannot be such a base, bad man."

But if it were true that Captain St. John was lashing those maddened animals to swifter pace—was the driver, the horrible laughter—what then!

Viola was brave and resolute by nature; she could meet danger half-way when it menaced her in tangible shape, and could steel her nerves to face great suffering without a murmur—but not such danger, not such a fate as that which threatened her if Victor St. John was on the driver's seat and knew that Viola Hartly was in the carriage.

Half crazed by the thought, she thrust her head from the broken window and shrieked for help. She pealed shriek after shriek upon the damp night air; but the hearers, safe within their houses, did no more than say:

“Tis some runaway carriage—we can do nothing but pity.”

“May Heaven help me!” murmured Viola, sinking back upon the seat.

She did not swoon; a strong and courageous nature like hers could not swoon, but nerved itself to dare and encounter the worst.

The carriage suddenly drew up before a house—of which Viola could form no idea, save that it was dark and deserted—after a drive that seemed to her an age, though in fact it had not lasted ten minutes.

The unknown driver leaped to the ground, whistled sharply, the same shrill whistle that had alarmed Viola when with Jane, and the door of the carriage was torn open.

“Your servant, Miss Viola Hartly,” said the driver, with an audible sneer, and Viola knew that her abductor was Capt. Victor St. John!

CHAPTER VIII.

VICTOR ST. JOHN.

DESPITE her great courage Viola shrank back from the speaker, although in the pitchy darkness she could not see his features; but she heard his voice, and more terrible still, the cold, hard, dry and mocking laugh—not loud now, but low and exultant, like the growl of a hungry wolf as his fangs rent the flesh of his helpless victim.

“Your very humble servant, Miss Hartly,” continued Victor St. John. “Will you oblige me by giving me your hand, that I may have the pleasure of assisting you from the carriage.”

She could not see the face, but she needed no seeing to perceive its expression. She knew it was sneering with mockery and blazing with the malicious triumph of a devil.

Her screams might rescue her from his power, and she again shrieked for aid. But Victor St. John sprang into the carriage and grasped her as if about to gag her with his open hand.

Any indignity but the horror of his hated touch!

“Loose me!” gasped Viola, writhing from his hand as he pressed it over her mouth. “Free me! Have mercy, sir and I will not scream. Leave the carriage, and I will get out without assistance.”

“You gratify me exceedingly,” replied St. John, in the same mocking tone, but will excuse me for grasping your fair arm, as the night is dark and you might stumble—or find my poor company so unpalatable as to desire to leave it.”

“Tell me why you have so outraged me?” demanded Viola as she stepped upon the pavement. “You, who pretended such friendship to my father, such love and respect for me?”

“Did you not declare your rejection of my honorable suit final? Did I not tell you that such an answer would drive me to despair, Viola Hartly? You see the madman at his game of desperation. But we will converse more at ease in the house,” said St. John his tones changing to mockery. “Your father bade me never enter his house again, and I told him the loss would be his and not mine. My words are coming

true, and when we are better acquainted, Viola—as I am sure we shall be—you will discover that I never make a menace without a blow—sooner or later. Come, madam, I am waiting for you.”

Viola shuddered as she remarked the deliberate tone of command he already assumed.

“Must I enter that dreadful house?” she murmured, ready to sink with fear.

“Why dreadful? You have never been in it?” sneered St. John, as Viola stood upon the pavement. “I think we may make it very agreeable. Do not start so fearfully, Viola. You must enter that house, quietly or by force, and I assure you you shall not leave it as Viola Hartly, but as Mrs. Victor St. John.”

“I may perish there, villain, but never shall I bear the name of a being—a thing I detest,” said Viola, with bitter contempt and heroic firmness.

“Do not irritate me,” whispered St. John. “I am more dangerous and far more reckless than you can deem me.”

She felt his grasp upon her arm grow painfully rigid, and knew by the hissing sound of his voice that he spoke through his set teeth.

And this was the fascinating Captain St. John, whom all the ladies young, and old, of the Crescent City, had pointed out and praised as a model of a gentle warrior! This was the *gentleman* whose rich and manly tones had often accompanied hers in joyous or mournful song, in the parlors of her father and her father’s admiring friends!

What would they think, were they to see and hear him *now*, heaping ruffianly indignities upon the much loved and much envied daughter of the rich Georgian, Col. Lionel Hartly!

St. John was dragging rather than leading her towards the house, the door of which was elevated several feet from the street, and accessible by a flight of stone steps, when Viola heard the sound of rapidly nearing hoofs.

If she could but gain time until the horseman should be passing the spot, and she knew from the speed of his horse, invisible but growing rapidly clear to the ear, that a moment would bring him there!

She would shriek as only a despairing woman can shriek, and if the rider were human her voice of horrible anguish would warn him of the villainous outrage she was suffering.

But Victor St. John hurried up the steps, forcing her along with all a madman's tenacious power

He had divined her intention, and frustrated her last hope of speedy rescue; for the horseman plunged by as if riding for a great stake for life or death, and was out of hearing in a moment.

But at the instant he swept by, the door of the house was thrown open, and the glare of a bull's eye lantern flashed, like the lightning's gleam, over the face of the rider.

That face was visible but for an instant, passing into the nky darkness so quickly, that it seemed a missile hurled through the air and athwart the lantern's sheen, but Viola's straining eyes recognized it as plainly as if she had been gazing upon it for an hour in the broad glare of the sun.

Victor St. John recognized it, too, and he uttered a bitter malediction upon the soul of its owner; for it was the proud and handsome face of his rival, of Viola's accepted lover, of Henry Allison—riding like mad to be in time to receive his dying mother's blessing—riding with the hearty permission of his general from the battle-field of the morrow, to see his mother once more before she died.

"May you break your proud neck, Henry Allison," said St. John, still retaining his pressure upon Viola's lips. "But here comes another riding a steple-chase," he continued, as the sound of approaching hoofs was again heard. "Let's see who follows. Hold your lantern at the same angle, Raymond."

He spoke to the person who had opened the door, and whose features Viola could not see, because the peculiar construction of the lantern threw all its rays in a single volume outwards and not upwards.

The second rider darted by, and again the gleam swept over the face of the horseman, and then he was gone headlong into the black deep of the night.

"It is Gen. Allison," said St. John; "and he rides well and bravely for the old veteran. They must have heard of the illness of Mrs. Allison. There will be rare search for you, Viola, this night, but it will not be my fault if some of the maiden hunters do not make a bloody ending to their sport. They will not find you, Viola," he added as he lifted her, bodily, into the house and withdrew his polluting palm from her outraged lips.

"Scream and shriek to your hearts content now, fair lady,"

he continued, as he closed and locked the door. "This house is isolated, and the nearest tenements are tenanted only by rats—which are but poor allies to weeping maids. Viola."

Smearing again: and how satanic his strangely handsome face looked when he mocked his prey!

"Am I weeping?" demanded Viola, drawing her queenly form erect and flashing scorn and defiance upon him from her splendid eyes of blue.

"You are a Zenobia, my Viola," said he, gazing on her indignant beauty with a bold and exultant admiration that drove the hot blood of anger from her cheeks, to leave them ashy white, and then sent it back until her face and neck were dyed to the deep crimson of insulted nobility.

They had passed from the vestibule, and were standing beneath a great chandelier of bronze which flamed with a score of waxen lights, and Viola, in her anguish of soul, longed for the darkness of the dismal streets, where she could escape from the baleful gleam of those fiery eyes.

In her extremity she turned to the person called Raymond but shuddered as she read nothing upon his ill-favored and scowling visage, save admiration and blind obedience for Victor St. John.

"She is beautiful, is she not, Raymond?" said St. John, as Viola drew her veil, over her face.

"Lovely as a Princess. As a Princess—as a Princess." echoed the bull-necked and dog-eyed scoundrel, rubbing his swarthy hands. "A regular downright Princess of Sheba, Captin."

"And I, Raymond? Am I not, as a man, as well favored as she?" said St. John, towering in his lofty stature far above the ugly and misshapen Raymond.

"You're a Prince—a Juke—a Herl, by my ghost, you are bay Hemperer!" almost shouted Raymond, eyeing his Captain from head to foot.

"And yet when I prayed her to become my wife," continued St. John in a deep and bitter tone, "what did she do?"

"She jumped at yer, Captin! I know she jumped at the hoffer of yer 'art-hand 'and!" cried Raymond rubbing his dirty paws till they smoked.

"No, she scorned me! She rejected me, Raymond!" exclaimed St. John fiercely.

"Impossible!" wheezed Raymond, holding up his great

horny hands in feigned astonishment. "Now if hi 'ad bin er hied jumped at yer—I would. Hand if hied bin *you* my wanity ud a bin shattered to bits, Captin."

And that was it. His vanity had been lacerated to madness and that grinning Gorilla of a man, that ugly deformed Raymond knew it. The thought pleased him wonderfully, and he rolled his big paws over each other, and then rubbed his hideous old visage with them as if he were washing himself with the astounding fact, that at last Victor St. John had been refused, rejected, scorned by a woman!

Viola, burning with shame but proud in her despair, remained standing, veiled and silent.

"Your vanity! Your vanity! And have you such a jewel in that carcass?" exclaimed St. John, nettled to the quick by the home-thrust, for he was vain of his beauty, even to folly.

"Perhaps I ave," said Raymond. "We all 'ave our weak ints, Captin."

"Be off, you porcupine—and send me your lovely wife to attend upon this lady," continued St. John.

And so that hobgoblin Raymond had a wife!

"She's lovely in her way," growled Raymond, as he moved away, still soaping his paws and washing his visage with *that* delicious fact, "She can out claw the devil in a pinch, Captin, and has clawed you out of many a scrape. She's seeing after the carriage."

"Be off and do as I command, you bandy-legged booby," shouted St. John.

Raymond hobbled away, leaving St. John and Viola gazing upon each other with far different emotions.

"You do not ask my clemency," said St. John, after a pause.

She did not reply, but he could see the gleam of her scornful eyes even through her veil; and despite his brutal, bestial hardihood seemed to quail and dwindle before her.

"The bird newly caged seldom sings," pursued he, in his insulting, mocking way. "When used to her cage she will sing right merrily."

There was a triple rap at the street door, and St. John stepped into the vestibule.

"Who goes?" he asked with his lips at the key hole.

Viola did not hear the reply but it was whispered into the ear of St. John as he bent his head to the orifice:

“An enemy.”

“Who comes?” asked St. John, as before.

The whispered response was:

“B. & B.”

And St. John opened the door to admit Carlos, the Spaniard.

“You must have flown to be here so soon,” remarked St. John.

“I clung to the carriage after rapping the head of Biddy Blackbird,” said Carlos, swaggering into the hall—for so he turned his exploit by knocking down poor Jane. “Her head was as hard as the core of the Pyramids, and I had to rap it twice before she keeled like a shot duck. You were off like a curse, but I swung on behind, and would have been here as soon as you; but as the team slewed around a corner some five hundred yards from this, I slipped my cable and was shot into the gutter like a sack of coffee. But here I am—how’s the bird?”

Carlos did not wait for an answer but crowded past St. John into the hall, where his audacious stare greeted the unfortunate Viola.

“So—my lady, you are there. If you’d had your figure head harpered with a jib like that when in the drug shop, dash me, my beauty, if you wouldn’t be at safe anchorage in old Allison’s harbor now. But your veil—is that the name of the rag—was hauled ’midships and I knew you were the Captain’s fancy.”

“I owe this indignity to you, then?” said Viola, coldly, though her heart sickened as she saw the web of villainy around her.

“I was not long in signalizing the Captain, madam, and we hashed a pretty plot between us—didn’t we?” replied Carlos, combing his great black beard with his fingers. “We scared you out of your wits and you ran into the trap like a gull.”

“Come you have said enough,” interposed St. John, who chafed at the ruffian’s familiarity. “This lady is under my protection and in my house.”

“Steady,” said Carlos, with his swaggering lurch. “Our bargain is only half done, Captain. I have aided you to catch your Pheasant, your hand is pledged to help me snare my Bird o’ Paradise. You have your Viola—I want my Rosetta.”

Viola started violently, and almost sank with terror as she perceived that the villains had made a fiendish compact. But in all her terror she pitied the miserable Rosetta for loving the heartless St. John, and her indignation leaped to her lips.

"Captain St. John if you are human I pray you spare that unhappy girl, whose love you have won to sell to that bad man. She is but a child."

"Ah, you have seen Rosetta? You know her!" exclaimed St. John.

"She was in my presence not an hour since," continued Viola, "and I know that it is her dangerous misfortune to love you. Spare—"

But Carlos broke in savagely:

"Does she? We will cure that love, and she may love as good a man in Carlos Lollio as in Captain St. John. When she learns that all the Captain's love-making was for me, she will hate him like a hangman. But blow the luck that put her on the street this night and I not knowing it!

"Why was she with you?" demanded St. John.

"I am not here to cater to your curiosity," responded Viola, haughtily.

Raymond now appeared, followed by his wife, a sour-faced vixen as absurdly tall as he was short.

Viola saw at a glance that she could expect no ally in Raymond's *lovely wife*."

"Marbel," said St. John to this twist-eyed Hecate, "this lady is now in your charge. She is not very handsome, Miss Hartly, but you will find her very faithful to—*me*! I beg you will follow her, Miss Hartly, and console yourself under her guardianship with the certainty that the future madam St. John will soon have better company."

He bowed with mock ceremony, and as Viola followed the silent Marble, said to Raymond:

"Keep close guard of my treasure, old Argus, and I will pay you well."

Then turning to Carlos he continued:

"You have some business of the League on hand; I will go part of the way with you. Raymond, bring the casket I spoke of this evening."

"I 'ave it 'ere," said Raymond, giving the Captain a small ebony box, inlaid with ivory and gold.

"You are ever ready, Raymond," pursued St. John.

"Come, Carlos, I have an appointment at ten. Some of our fellows of the League demand gold in hand before striking blow, and my purse needs replenishing.

"My cloak, Raymond."

"What pawn broker do you patronize?" asked Carlos, as Raymond opened the door for their exit.

"Beneditto, the Fortune-Teller."

"Good, we shall take back the jewels are long," said Carlos.

"But not the gold," laughed St. John, and then both disappeared in the darkness of the street.

"Heave-ho!—both of 'em," grinned Raymond, peering into the gloom. "But the Captain is a diamint—he is the King of Diamints. Luck to him."

With this benediction he closed and locked the door, and walked away to his own quarters, soaping and washing himself with this last fact:

"The Captain is as pretty a rascal as ever I see."

CHAPTER IX.

VIOLA'S LOVER.

VICTOR ST. JOHN and Carlos soon parted in the street, to meet again by agreement before midnight, and the former bent his steps towards the dwelling of the fortune-teller.

While he is on his way, muffled to the eyes, in his rich and heavy cloak, scheming for Rosetta's destruction, let us return to the house of General Allison.

After Viola and Jane's departure, the timid but sweet-souled Harriet Allison returned to the bed-side of her moaning mother, to listen to the anguish she could not alleviate, and to watch the slow moving hand of the dial on the mantel.

She knew that to converse with her mother was strictly forbidden by the family physician, and could only denote her gentle presence by smoothing the fevered brow with her soft hand, and pressing her mother's hot and restless fingers with her loving lips, from time to time.

The vigil grew longer and more painful every instant, and Harriet's eyes began to flash impatience as she saw the dial hand had crept five, ten, fifteen minutes, half an hour beyond the time necessary to visit and return from the pharmacy. Her face grew pale and her heart like lead, as she began to imagine something dreadful had happened to Viola.

"Oh that I had gone with her," she murmured, as she hurried to the window, and vainly strove to peer into the darkness without. "Oh that she had not gone at all. Surely something terrible must have happened!"

A deeper moan from the invalid hurried her to the sick bed.

"Has your father come?" whispered the sufferer.

"He will come dear mother," replied Harriet, soothingly. "We have sent most urgent messages to him and to brother Henry—they have far to ride and with brief notice."

"Was not Viola Hartly here a little while ago?" continued her mother.

A little while ago! To Harriet the time seemed an age, and she trembled to think that the hot fever was mounting to her mother's brain and making her delirious.

"She was here, my mother," replied poor Harriet. "She will return immediately—she has gone for medicine."

"Is it not night," asked the invalid, "I thought it was a wedding night, and I saw Henry wed Viola at the altar—it was a very pleasant dream, and I should like to see it a reality. Ah, my poor head—it aches—my husband, my son do not be rash in battle," and then, sighing deeply, the invalid sank into a profound slumber.

Harriet knelt by the bed, and was beseeching Heaven to spare her mother's life, when she heard a horse dash up to the front gate, then a deep growl from the dog, then a joyful bark of recognition, and forgot her despairing prayer in sudden joy.

"Viola has returned, or perhaps—yes the horse—it must be father or brother," she thought, as she arose and hurried from the room and down the stairs into the hall below.

She opened the door and was instantly locked in her brother's arms.

"Our mother?" he whispered.

"Is very, very ill. Our father?" responded Harriet.

"Is coming—listen! You may hear his horse as he spurs him. Meet him, Harriet—I will hurry to our dear mother."

"She sleeps, Henry—ah, father is at the gate—he dismounts—he is running—poor father—he is here!"

And again the gentle girl was folded in manly arms.

"Your mother—my wife—does she live!" exclaimed Gen. Allison, almost breathless.

"Lives, and that is all, my father," replied Harriet, as the three hastened with noiseless feet to the sick chamber.

The father, son and daughter stood silent and sad, by the bed-side, gazing with tearful eyes upon the beloved face of the wife and mother they deemed dying. The father, a noble snowy-haired veteran, tall, dignified and commanding; the son, as noble, but in the golden prime of manhood, with lofty port and superior bearing, handsome, brave, elegant and vigorous; the daughter, as lovely, fair and fragile as a lily, pure, graceful and gentle; the mother, a virtuous, pious matron, racked with fever, even in her unnatural slumber.

Harriet drew her father and brother aside and told them of Viola, and of her startling absence.

Henry grew pale, for his love for Viola was his second soul, yet he replied :

“The physician must be summoned at once—the loss of the medicine may be fatal. I will call for Dr. Burrit at once—and—”

He paused, for filial love and duty bade him say : “and hasten back ;” while the passionate and adoring love of youth, alarmed to speechless agony, would prompt—“and seek Viola !”

But his father came to the rescue.

“I know your love for your mother, my dear boy,” said Gen. Allison, pressing his hand. “Hasten to summon the doctor—for you are more active than I—and then seek for Miss Hartly.”

“And you father ?”

“My duty is here,” replied the husband, though he assumed stoicism he could not feel.

At this reply Henry bowed profoundly, and glided from the apartment.

He was soon in the street and upon his horse, whose mettle had not succumbed to a headlong race of ten miles.

With a slash of his whip and a thrust of his spurs, resented by a desperate plunge of his horse, Henry dashed along the street, almost riding down a mounted patrol, and with it in full chase speeded to the house of the family doctor.

As he drew rein before the mansion he heard the clatter of pursuing hoofs, but leaping from the saddle sprang to the door and struck it repeatedly with the heavy handle of his riding whip.

Before his summons could elicit a reply from within, he was surrounded by a trio of the patrol.

“Who rides ?” demanded the leader, springing the slide of his lantern.

“*Chalmette !*” replied Henry ; and as the light gleamed upon his uniform, the sentinel exclaimed :

“It is Capt. Allison. All’s well, Captain,” and was turning away when Henry said :

“Halt ! I may need your services, Sergeant.”

The door was then opened, Henry delivered his tidings, and

was answered by the physician. who had followed the servant to the door :

“ I will ride there immediately, Captain Allison. Saddle my horse, James,” said the doctor, who was a man of prompt action and famous repute.

Henry hurriedly expressed his thanks, and turning to the chief of the patrol said :

“ Mount! a young lady has suddenly and suspiciously disappeared. Ride after me !”

His commands were obeyed, and he at once directed his course towards the pharmacy at which Viola had called first, as he hoped he might hear some tidings of her there.

As it was not more than half-past nine o'clock the weazen-faced lad was still awake, though in the act of closing the doors of the establishment.

Henry called his attention, and asked :

“ Has a young lady, with a black woman, called here to-night ?”

Weazen-face took his own time in thinking about replying, until Henry roused him with a slash across his back.

“ Oh !” answered weazen-face, with a yell and a jump. “ Yes—a young lady for medicine—Miss Hartly and General Allison’s black woman, Jane—hello! is [that you Captain Henry ?”

Being assured that it was, weazen-face told all he knew, and twice as much more.

“ Were there any persons near when she was here ?” asked Henry.

“ Let me see—yes—a fellow put his head in, and snatched it out as if he smelt something dreadful sweet—it was Carlos, the Spaniard.”

“ Great Heaven !” ejaculated Henry, spurring his horse. “ We must make haste. I have seen that villain—one of the deserters from LaFitte’s Barratarians.”

“ As dangerous a rascal as any unchanged,” remarked the chief of the patrol. “ We suspected that we saw him driving a carriage in this vicinity not half an hour ago—not on this street, but near here.”

“ And was there any one in the carriage ?” exclaimed Henry, feeling sick and faint.

“ The carriage was empty, sir. For I flashed the lantern—

into it as it rattled by—he was driving like mad,” replied the sergeant.

“Why did you not stop or pursue him?”

“He gave the countersign, and we recognized the carriage by its facings and trappings.”

“Whose carriage was it?” demanded Henry.

“Col. Hartly’s sir. No carriage is rigged out in the same style in this city. The driver’s hat was slouched over his face, but we could see that he was a white man—Col. Hartly’s regular driver is a black, named Cuba. Still, the Colonel has a white driver. No one could suspect anything wrong in seeing his carriage at any time, as it has been much used by Gen. Jackson and his aids while in the city.”

“We must see Col. Hartly immediately,” remarked Henry, drawing rein. “I am bewildered with fear for the safety of Miss Hartly—she is the missing lady—which is the shortest way to the Colonel’s mansion?”

Before the sergeant could reply a deep groan was heard not far on, and apparently proceeding from the gutter.

“This way,” cried Henry, bounding his horse into the gloom, whence the groan arose.

The groan was repeated, apparently under the animal’s feet. Henry sprang to the ground exclaiming:

“Show the lantern, sergeant, here is some wounded person. Jane!” he added as the sergeant pushed back the lantern-slide, and discovered the prostrate form of the poor woman.

“My friends, what outrage has been perpetrated? She has received two severe blows upon the head. Jane! speak Jane! We are friends—I am Captain Allison—don’t you know your master? What has happened?—where is Miss Hartly?”

Jane, who had recovered from the stunning effects of Charles’ brutal blows many minutes before Henry’s arrival, but had been in mortal fear of showing any signs of life, until she heard the patrol, now scrambled to her feet and cried out:

“She’s runned off wid! Day’s captured her—dem British—I foug like a tiger and tore the har out of five of dare heads—I kicked, *and* I bit, *and* I fit, *and* I bit, *and* I yelled; but ten of ’em stabbed me with the swords, and a hundred knocked my head all to pieces with musketers—that’s all I know.”

It required several minutes to sift the truth from such chaff as the valiant Jane scattered around, but Henry’s searching

questions at length got a general outline of the affair and he inquired :

“ Was it Col. Hartly’s carriage ? ”

“ Good Lor’ ! ’Twas all dark—we just felt our way along to it,” said the bewildered servant. “ De carridge lamps war’nt lit, marster Henry.”

A horseman dashed by at full speed, with the words :

“ *Chalmette ! To the sick !* ”

“ It is Dr. Burritt,” observed Henry.

“ The truest man to his patients in America,” said the sergeant. “ God bless him ! ”

“ So say I,” said Henry, and then continued, “ Sergeant, let one of your men accompany this woman to my father’s gate. We must hasten to Col. Hartly’s.”

“ Who goes there ? ” suddenly exclaimed the sergeant, spurring his horse towards a form dimly visible in the dying rays of the street lamp—in those days hanging from a beam extended into the street.

“ A friend,” said the unknown.

“ Advance and give the countersign.”

“ *Chalmette !* ” was the reply.

“ On whose affairs ? ” demanded the sergeant, flashing the lantern upon the stranger.

“ My own,” said the deep voice of Victor St. John, dropping his cloak from his face.

“ Ah, is it you, Captain St. John,” cried the sergeant. “ The nephew of so true a patriot as Gen. Harper, may pass unquestioned.”

“ I pass unquestioned as Captain Victor St. John, and not because I am the nephew of any man,” said St. John, haughtily, and striking the hilt of his sabre fiercely. Then, as by a turn of the lantern he saw the pale and proud face of Captain Allison looking down upon him, he touched his chapeau slightly, and continued :

“ What news from the camp, Capt. Allison ? ”

“ The camp regrets that Capt. St. John had the misfortune *not* to fight at Detroit, as it loses his valuable services now,” replied Henry riding on, leaving St. John in doubt whether the speech was a compliment or an insult.

The sergeant and his follower rode after Henry, and St. John hurled a muttered imprecation after the party, saying :

“ The bird has been missed, but they cannot trace the

swarer. I'll put your head under my heel ere long, Henry Allison—I have your heart there now, my gay war-eagle. But I must to the fortune-teller's—or rather the pawn broker's—I think the knave is a Jew, and it puzzles me to recall where I have seen those clear cut Italian features—it must have been in Florence—such rascals flourish there, like mites in cheese. Curse these rough streets—I was within an ace of falling. Dark—but they will be well lighted before morn. Pakenham will advance at dawn, while New Orleans is in flames—ho, for Beauty and Booty! This thing well accomplished will behold me a Br gadier, with a *Sir* to my name, wealth in my purse, Viola my wife! 1780 had its Benedict Arnold. let 1815 have its Victor St. John."

Thus revolving his treacherous thoughts, he hurried on, until he paused before the house of Benditto.

The cathedral clock was striking the hour of ten, and as St. John lifted the heavy knocker within his firm grasp he muttered:

"Within four hours New Orleans will be in flames! Sleep well till then, good citizens!"

CHAPTER X.

HENRY LE GRAND.

MARIO and Benditto consumed much time in their search for the Spanish coin bearing date 1783, and of the same value as that from which the latter had so cunningly taken an impression in wax. The contents of the two were nearly exhausted when Benditto exclaimed:

“At last! I have found it! It is a very rare coin, Mario. I think we might have searched the city over and not found it—save in the pockets of the conspirators. Now for our graver’s tools—you are an excellent engraver. Here, between the date, and the Spanish coat of arms you must engrave the motto, “B. & B.” You are meditating.”

“I am asking myself a question, and find no answer,” replied Mario.

“Ask it of me then.”

“You have no doubt, Benditto, that this coin is used as a passport by these supposed conspirators—supposed, for we do not know that any conspiracy exists.”

“Couple the rumors that have been flying about the city during the last two days with the facts that a mysterious inscription has been seen upon the premises of the rich, and upon this rare coin, Mario. Upon our door also, inscribed there this night—the fact that three known rascals have used it, St. John, Carlos and Louis Dufau. Does it not smell of conspiracy, and are they persons to conspire for trifles?”

“Admit then that there is a plot, and that the coin is a passport among the plotters—their secret sign of villainy. Suppose each conspirator has a coin like this, but bearing a date to correspond with his name. That is, imagine St. John’s coin dated 1780; that of Carlos, 1781; that of another, 1782; that of Dufau, 1783, and so on, in regular order, from the first to the last of the plotters.”

“What then?”

“You, or I, or our emissary, with this coin, which we are about to engrave with the secret sign, will use it—enter the

nest of the schemers, and be discovered by the mere duplication of the date."

"Then we must capture a conspirator—learn his name and use that with his coin," cried Benditto. "What a pity that we allowed Dufau to leave our house."

"Yadak has his eyes upon him, and will soon report to us. We must make Dufau our prisoner this night."

As he spoke, Yadak entered the hall below, and made known his presence by a slight stroke upon the gong.

"He has returned already," said Mario. "Retain the coin—I will engrave it if we think it best. We must see master Dufau first."

The gold was returned to the caskets, the caskets to the secret closet, and the old men withdrew to the saloon of portraits, where they found Yadak.

"I followed the youth, masters, and he is now in an obscure house with several of his own age," said Yadak in Arabic, his only means of communication by tongue with the old men.

"Is it far from here, Yadak?"

"Not far, masters, but the youth was slow in going thither, for he made many countermarches, as if he feared a spy."

"Were his companions at the house when the youth arrived there?"

"Some of them."

"You do not speak English, nor any Christian tongue, Yadak; yet you understand many," said Mario. "Relate all that you understood, if you heard any of their conversation."

"After dogging the youth to the house," resumed Yadak, "he entered, and the door shut him from my sight. He knocked at the door and whispered something into the key hole. He was admitted soon after. I then noticed that the house was old and ruinous, and no light was visible from within. I also correctly imagined that the neighboring houses were vacant, and so cautiously stole into the one adjoining that into which the youth had vanished. Ascending to the roof of this house, I clambered to that of the other; but finding no means of entrance to the house from the roof, succeeded in swinging myself without noise to the house beyond, from which I entered through a ruined widow into that which I had just quitted. I felt my way through a vacant room, and finally gained a situation from which I could look down into the hall and hear

the sound of voices conversing in a subdued tone. After a time, the door was opened to admit another visitor, and I heard the number 1748 whispered, and then all was silent again. Not long after I heard another admitted and the sound of a coin or small piece of metal falling upon the floor, which seemed paved with stone or brick. Then the words, '1783 is it—here it is—' Pass in.' There was a light of some kind in the hall, but from my position I could not see the persons below—nor did I dare to move. Hearing no more, and fearful of discovery I retreated and am here."

"Well done—but how did you know that the companions of the youth were of his age!" said Benditto.

"From the sound of their voices—which though indistinct and subdued, my masters, were not those of older men. I, who have outwitted the prowling Bedouins, of the desert, cannot be deceived.

Yadak drew his powerful frame erect, and folded his arms with dignified pride.

"Well done, my Yadak," said Mario.

"Go back to the house and watch for the out-coming of the youth, and capture him as you were wont to capture the young lions of Syria. Be discreet, and convey the lad hither. Doubtless he will soon come out. I leave the affair in your hands."

Yadak made an obeisance and departed.

"You see," said Mario, to Benditto, "that my suspicion was correct—the coins are of different dates and belong to individual names. This coin can be of no use to us."

"Let us wait until Yadak returns. Hark! It strikes ten—and listen! the knocker smites our door. Victor St. John has come," exclaimed Benditto.

"And I must hasten to admit him," said Mario, lighting a lamp and descending to the hall.

He strode to the door and admitted St. John who said, as he entered:

"I am the pink of punctuality, Benditto."

"Punctuality is but one of your innumerable virtues, Capt. St. John," replied Mario.

But whether the compliment was ironical or genuine, St. John was unable to say, for Mario's grizzly moustache hid the expression of his mouth, while St. John might have gazed into his keen black eyes a century, and been none the wiser.

"So—you know my name!" observed St. John, as he sat down in the chamber of oracles.

"You know you are here, Captain, to barter jewels," said Mario, blandly, "and I, as a tradesman have taken the precaution to inquire about my intended customer."

"You have?" sneered St. John, eyeing the old man with supreme contempt. "Well, what says your report of me?"

"That he is loved by the ladies, and envied; often feared by the gentlemen?"

"That of course," remarked St. John, with a complacent smile: "but what of my righteousness, my standing as a man of honor?"

"That you pay your debts of honor."

"Which is a vile round-about way of saying that I am a gambler, you Shyloek. Say, are you not a Florentine Jew?" demanded St. John quickly.

"I am as the honorable Captain sees," replied Mario, controlling his voice to calmness with a mighty effort. "I am Benditto, the fortune-teller, or money-lender, as you may desire."

"Were you ever in Florence, Benditto?"

"My profession has carried me to every city of the European Continent, Captain. I have been in Florence. Why does the Captain ask?"

"Simply because I once saw a picture there of a Hebrew, a rich and haughty Hebrew, of which you remind me strangely."

St. John leaned his head upon his hand, his elbow resting upon the table, and seemed busy in the past.

Mario awaited his desires in respectful silence.

"Tell me," said St. John at length; "when were you last in Florence?"

"Three years ago, Signor Captain."

"Three years—ah. Did you ever hear of a wealthy Hebrew, of Florence, named Antelli?—let me see—Mario Antelli?"

"I have heard of the man," replied Mario, "but he was not a Hebrew—he was reported of Hebrew descent. Some avowed and many denied that Mario Antelli, the rich Florentine nobleman, was a Hebrew. But it matters little what he was—he is dead."

"Ah! is he dead?" exclaimed St. John, with sudden vehemence. "And his son, Conrad!"

"Is dead also, Captain. You knew the family?"

"But slightly—very slightly, I think there was a daughter—I think her name was—strange that I should forget her name—ah yes—her name was Clara, an' English name," remarked St. John, carelessly. "And what of her foster brother, Yadak?"

"Clara Antelli lives," said Mario, as carelessly. "Yadak is dead."

"What! She lives! Clara Antelli lives!" exclaimed St. John, wildly and springing to his feet. "She died, old man! she died of poison—so I heard."

"Your honor is correct," remarked Mario. "I had confounded Clara Antelli with Clara Orsini—a totally different person. You are right, Signor—the daughter of Count Mario died many years ago. Let us to business, Captain. You have the jewels with you?"

"Yes, I have them in this casket," said St. John, vacantly, and placing the box upon the table. "But I would like to hear a little more of the Antelli family."

"The Captain seems much interested in the fate of that unfortunate family," remarked Mario, as his eyes began to glitter strangely.

"I have good reason to be so, Benditto. That family was the ruin of my twin brother," said St. John, with eyes that glittered as keenly as Mario's.

"Your twin brother, Signor! Had you ever a twin brother?" cried Mario.

"Of course—or rather why not I, as well as Esau or any one else," replied St. John coldly. "He was as like me in form, voice and feature as eye to eye. You seem surprised that I have had a twin brother."

"Not at all—the coincidence surprised me," said Mario, calmly, and sitting down. "May I ask what was the name of your twin brother, honorable Captain!"

"His name in Florence, some fifteen years ago, was Henri Le Grand. What was that coincidence of which you spoke?" replied St. John.

"Why I had a twin brother also, Captain."

"The deuce you did? And may I ask what his name was?" cried St. John.

"His name in Florence was Mario, Count Antelli!" replied Mario.

"You are Count Mario!" thundered St. John, again springing to his feet and laying his hand upon his sabre.

But Mario did not rise, he seemed the picture of astonishment.

"The captain raves," said he coolly. "I cannot be the Count Mario, for he died ten years ago. If your brother, who bore the name of Henri Le Grand, told you aught of the Antelli family he surely made mention of Mario's exiled brother Benditto."

"So he did—so he did," said St. John, resuming his seat. "But if you are that Benditto Antelli, why are you in America following a profession all men call a mockery, a swindle? The titles and estates of Count Mario should have fallen to you."

"So they did, Signor. But Benditto in those days was not the Benditto of 1815. Then he loved to squander money, now he loves to make and hoard it."

"So you are Count Mario's brother," said St. John, musingly. "Well, tell me something of Henri Le Grand, as he called himself—he died soon after he left Florence."

"Yes, 'twas said he died. Perhaps he did. I never troubled myself about the matter. Count Mario disowned me while he lived, and his troubles were for himself. Still, if Henri Le Grand were alive, and now before me, Captain, I would stab him before he could cry, 'Mercy!'"

"Would you?" sneered St. John. "He was nimble at that game himself, friend Benditto. I doubt that your dagger would not be met half way by his. But he is dead—and there's an end of him. But he never harmed you, did he? In fact, he told me he had never seen either Count Mario, or his brother Benditto."

"Very true, Signor. But he outraged a noble family, my brother's family," said Mario, with flashing eyes. "He persuaded Clara Antelli, Mario's only daughter, to forsake her father's roof and become his wife."

"That was a terrible outrage," said St. John with his mocking laugh. "Such outrages are very common."

"He did not stop there," said Mario fiercely. "But even the marriage was an outrage, for Le Grand married Clara Antelli to win a wager. He never loved her—not he! He laid a wager one day in Florence, with some of his wild

comrades, that he could cajole any damsel in Italy to marry him secretly. Do you divine the rascal's intention?"

"Well, not clearly," said St. John.

"It was to win the wager and Clara at the same time—for Le Grand intended that the marriage should be an empty ceremony—a mere sham. He had no desire to link himself for life to any one woman."

"He was very wise, that scape-grace brother of mine," remarked St. John.

"He was a devil in cunning," said Mario. "But Count Mario was as cunning as Henri Le Grand; for though in Russia as an ambassador, at the time, he heard of the wager and was informed that the young rakes had selected his daughter Clara as a fit test for the bet. He hastened to Florence to find his child really in love with Le Grand, but Le Grand was then absent from Florence upon a travelling tour. So the father threatened his child with a convent—he swore to send her to a nunnery, and to slay her lover if ever he heard of any more love making."

"Of course that terrified Henri Le Grand—when he heard of the awful threat?" said St. John, with his cold mocking smile.

"No, he was a dare-devil," continued Mario. "The Count was forced to return to Russia; yet he loved his daughter too well to blast her happiness. Therefore, before he left, he took good care that if there was to be a marriage, it should be valid and true, even if secret."

"Shrewd old father! Sensible too," laughed St. John. "He knew that when a girl is determined to wed the man she loves, she will do it if the world cries, nay! Sharp old fellow."

"So it proved," resumed Mario; "for Le Grand won Clara to elope with him to a sham marriage—as he imagined. But the marriage was as good as gold, and firmer than steel."

Well, the wager was won by Le Grand, and for more than a year he was true to his wife—not knowing she was entitled to that sacred name."

"Then he did love her a little?" interrupted St. John, carelessly.

"Perhaps he had some fragment of a human heart in his bosom," said Mario. "The Count refused to acknowledge his disobedient daughter after the marriage—to punish her; though he intended to forgive her in the end."

"But he didn't slay Le Grand after all the blustering," sneered St. John. "He would have found my brother quite hard to kill."

"Very likely, Captain—if he was such a warrior as you are—though you may be killed one of these days," said Mario, bowing blandly.

"Go on," sneered St. John, twirling his moustache.

"But after a child had been born to the youthful pair," continued Mario, "Le Grand grew weary of Clara's love, and told her of his baseness—he gloried in his supposed success. She quickly proved to him that she was indeed his lawful wife, and then what do you suppose he did?"

"Why, made the best of it, of course," said St. John, though his face grew pale.

"He poisoned her, and fled from Florence!" exclaimed Mario.

"Then he was more than a match for the cunning Florentines," laughed St. John; but there was no soul in his laugh, nor was it mocking—it was like a broken, disjointed hiss. "But the child of Le Grand—what became of that?"

"What is it to you, sir?" demanded Mario, tartly.

"Fellow!" cried St. John, "you forget to whom you are privileged to speak. Address me in that tone again, and not only will I take my jewels elsewhere, but kick you through the wall for your impertinence, were you Mario Antelli himself."

"I humbly crave my gracious Captain's pardon," said Mario, bowing most obsequiously. "I *did* forget myself. Pardon."

St. John eyed the old man keenly, and finally remarked:

"I half a mind to believe you are mocking me with feigned humility, you Barrabas. But what of the child—a boy, I think, my brother said."

"It was a girl," resumed Mario. "She was named Clara, after her mother."

"So, a girl? Well, what became of the child?"

"Count Mario, the grandfather, adopted it after its mother's death."

"Know you if the girl lives?" asked St. John, with a deeper feeling in his tone than had moved his icy soul for years.

"She would be your niece—if she were living?" observed Mario.

"Very true, Benditto; and as I regret my miserable brother's misdeeds, almost as much as if I had been as criminal, why, if my niece lives, and needs assistance, I will extend a hand."

"But if she needs no assistance, my dear Captain?"

"I would like—no—she is nothing to me," remarked St. John; and then said to his heart: "This fellow thinks he is deceiving me—I know that Count Mario's brother, the exiled Benditto, was lost at sea, years ago. Ha! this pretended mountebank is Count Mario himself. I have run my head into danger here. It is very plain that he believes I am merely a brother of Le Grand—still, I must be wary—bah! I am a match for ten such old skeletons!"

And while he reflected this Mario thought as follows:

"He is deceived! He thinks I am Count Mario's brother—he thinks I believe he is simply Captain Victor St. John—and such may be his true name. But, as I live, Henri Le Grand, the husband and assassin of Clara Antelli, is before me."

"The child lives, I believe, Signor Captain," said Mario, aloud.

"I care not," exclaimed St. John, with a fierce oath. "Let her live then—she is nothing to me. Let us to business—time presses, and I have wasted too much in empty talk."

"Very true," said Mario. "Let us talk of business. The crimes and misfortunes of others are nothing to us, Captain."

"Nothing, old man—not a puff of smoke. I need money—not sympathy."

"True; money is the pulse of life," said Mario. "So to business. Let us see the jewels, Signor Captain."

His keen eyes glittered, but whether with rage, hate, triumph or avarice remains to be told.

CHAPTER XI.

THE JEWELS.

ST. JOHN tossed aside his cloak and placed his hand upon the casket of jewels saying:

"You will recognize these jewels."

"I? Where have I seen them, Signor Captain?"

"I purchased them of my brother," replied St. John, calmly, as he fitted a key in the lock.

"And he?" asked Mario.

"Received them from his wife, Clara Antelli," replied St. John, opening the casket.

"Ah!" cried Mario, as the light flashed and glittered upon a superb necklace of diamonds, a golden cross studded with rubies and sapphires, bracelets of antique carving set with pearls and emeralds, and golden rings of rare value gleaming with precious stones.

Mario stared so fixedly upon this treasure that, for a moment, he forgot that the piercing blue eyes of his reckless visitor were watching him with an intensity almost painful.

Neither did St. John know that a pair of eyes, as keen, as piercing as his, were flashing hate and vengeance upon him from the gloom of the curtained recess—where crouched the real Beditto of this story.

"It seems you recognize them," remarked St. John, as he drew his sabre-hilt nearer to his hand, and fingered a pistol in his sash.

"They are the family jewels of the noble house of Antelli," replied Mario—heaving a deep sigh. "I have not seen them for many years. So you purchased them of your brother?"

"Who dares deny it?" said St. John.

"I am far from denying the truth of the honorable Captain's assertion," observed Mario, with a profound inclination of the head. "Still, I beg leave to aver, with due respect, Signor, and not as a claim, that the jewels are rightfully mine. Henri Le Grand having learned from his wife—the day before he poisoned her—where Count Mario kept the Antelli jewels, stole

"That brother of mine was a rare scapgrace," laughed St. John. "But the robbery was his—the purchase is mine, friend Benditto. Were we now in Florence you, as Count Benditto di Antelli, might force me to give them to you at once. But we are in America. I am Victor St. John, and you my tradesman, my prince of money lenders. I will sell them."

"This wretch," thought Mario, as he noted the scornful bearing of the powerful Captain, "believes me alone in this house, or by my soul he has his braves within hearing of his war cry! I have a giant to deal with. Still he does not suspect that I am Count Mario. I will try him."

"Captain," he said aloud, "as the heir of Count Mario I have a right to become a possessor of these jewels without purchase."

"A right, friend Benditto, is a phantom—a mere nothing to me, when the right to maintain it is a title," replied St. John, placing his hand upon the casket.

"That I well know," said Mario. "But if—a mere if—if I should say to you, 'Captain, these jewels are mine, for your worthy brother stole them from mine, who is dead, and I must take them, and then with a single stroke of this little banner surround you with drawn swords and cocked pistols—ready at my beck to cut and blow your head to atoms—eh? What then?'"

A pallor swept over St. John's laughty face, but he laughed scornfully and replied:

"Alone I would not fear your swords and pistols. Would I fear them, when by placing this whistle to my lips I can summon a force able to tear your house to ruins, and you into a thousand shreds. Listen!"

He blew a shrill, rattling whistle upon the silver tube he placed to his lips, and for an instant the street without seemed alive with similar sounds.

The peculiar, signal was heard at the very doors of the house.

"You hear," said St. John. "If I whistle again my friends out there will come in."

"Great Heaven!" thought Mario, "what a terrible man is this! How vigilant, how cunning. We thought him our helpless prey—and behold we may be his. Why does he not take the gold at once? It is because he is not ready to begin, and knows, or hopes to get money now and to take the jewels

back by force to-morrow, or when the plot sweeps forth from its hiding places in open rapine."

"Come, I am waiting on you, old man," said St. John, sternly. "What will you advance for the jewels?"

He spread the gems upon the table, and swept them into a heap again with his strong, handsome hands.

"How much do you desire?" asked Mario, hoarsely.

"They are worth a great fortune, my dear Benditto. Take them for ten thousand dollars in gold, and your check upon the United States Branch Bank of New Orleans—say for thirty thousand."

"The jewels are worth more, Signor Captain. See, this centre diamond of the cross is alone worth ten thousand dollars—it was once a gem in the coronet of the Duke of Venice."

"You are no Jew, Benditto, or you would not find such a fault with my price," remarked St. John. "I name the sum I gave my brother—nothing more or less."

"Why have you not sold them ere now, Captain?"

"What is that to you, old man?" demanded St. John, fiercely. "Perhaps because there was danger in trying to sell diamonds when all Europe had heard of their loss. No matter for that."

"How know you that my paper is valuable in the Bank you mention?" asked Mario.

"Perhaps I have a friend there," replied St. John. "Come, will you agree to my terms?"

"Ten thousand dollars in gold is a large sum—but I think I have it."

"And I know you have it, Benditto," muttered St. John, as Mario left the apartment, and toying with the jewels; "and before dawn I will pay your treasury another visit, Count Mario."

Mario hastened to Benditto's bed room, where he met Benditto, pale and fearfully excited.

"You are satisfied, Mario?"

"I am. This man is Henri Le Grand. His story of a twin brother is a falsehood."

"And he is a living lie," said Benditto with very angry bitterness.

"He is a terrible enemy, and we have dangerous work before us. We must advance the gold. My draft upon the Bank

will be worthless—I have no funds there—and he knows it.”

“Then why does he ask for your draft?”

“Because his cunning overreaches itself,” replied Mario. “He is in great and immediate need of gold—he must have it to use this very night. He thinks a money lender, with the bad reputation of Benditto for greed and avarice, will jump at a chance to obtain such diamonds for a trifle of valuable consideration in return, and a worthless check. He reasons thus: ‘This old Shylock will give me the gold—for he must to gain the gems, and having given me a worthless draft will run away before morning. But as I intend to regain the jewels by force I can part with them for a few hours.’ You see? He needs the gold *now*. For what? To tempt, to bribe, to hire bravos and cut-throats. Come, let us count out the gold—it is easily done—for we will not count it—best weigh it—knowing there are so many dollars to the ounce.”

“I desire to see the effect of our phantoms upon him,” said Benditto.

“And then?”

“If he repents, Mario, let us be merciful,” whispered Benditto.

“There, I have said your heart would fail you,” exclaimed Mario, quivering with rage. “No, he will not repent, he will mock, he will sneer! He shall die—we have sworn it, Benditto.”

“We have sworn it,” echoed Benditto, in a hollow voice of despair.

“Let not your heart fail you,” continued Mario, as he weighed out the gold. “It is done! Now, he will desire to see it weighed. Give me the scales—so. Now sweep the gold into this sack—so, it is very heavy, but I could carry the world upon my shoulders to-night. Be ready.”

So saying the old man returned to St. John, who was pouring over a map of the city.

He returned the map to his pocket as Mario entered, and said:

“A pleasant lifting, friend Benditto, you have the scales. Let me see the gold. Enough, you need not weigh it. I trust in your honesty. If there is a coin more or less it will be my gain or my loss. Now tie the sack securely. You are the Prince of money lenders, and the King of fortune-tellers.”

“The honorable Captain has seen nothing of my powers as

a wizard," remarked Mario, as he placed the jewels in the casket and locked it.

"If I had time—" said St. John, glancing at his watch. "Let's see, half-past ten—well, I have a few minutes to spare—with what will you amuse me?"

"Would you desire to see the phantom of your brother as he appeared in Florence some sixteen years ago?" asked Mario.

"Good! Let us see him, my friend."

Mario by some mechanical means filled the apartment with a steady rosy light, and then struck the table.

He paced to and fro a few times, the Captain looking on contemptuously, and then crying, "Behold him!" struck the table again.

The curtain arose from the recess and the image of Henri Le Grand, as in the portrait appeared.

"Good! Enough!" cried St. John, after gazing upon the image. "He was a handsome youth. Can you show me the lady he married?"

The curtain fell, rose again and the image of the Italian girl floated into view.

"Good Heaven! How true to life!" exclaimed St. John, as he gazed upon the lovely image.

"She was fair. Was it not a crime to ruin so lovely a being?" asked Mario, in a deep voice.

"Away with the image. Somehow it sends a chill through my soul. Away with it, old man, it is too much like life!" cried St. John.

"Like life? The Captain has never seen Clara Antelli alive," observed Mario.

"I say enough of this, old man," exclaimed St. John, staring wildly at the image.

"Henri Le Grand should have loved so fair a wife, Captain."

"She—"

"Was true to her husband—yet he murdered her!" said a female voice which seemed to issue from the lips of the image and in softest Tuscan.

"Ha! it speaks—your phantom speaks, Benditto!" ejaculated St. John, growing ghastly pale, "But pshaw! I know its some trick!"

"Henri! Henri! Dear Henri!" said the image in plaintive notes.

"Say! Do you hear the voice?" cried St. John, fiercely.

"I hear no voices save yours and mine," replied Mario coldly.

"You lie, old man! You lie!" exclaimed St. John quivering with passion, and thinking: "I know this is all a trick, a juggle, but Great Heaven, how that voice appals me! The voice of the dead!"

The image faded from view, and St. John laughed loudly to hide his terror.

"A capital trick, Benditto, but all lost upon me. I have seen enough. This folly is fit only for fools."

"Do you think Le Grand ever felt remorse for his crime, Signor Captain?" demanded Mario, carelessly.

"Summon him from the grave and ask," replied St. John, sneering.

"I will summon one from the grave to warn you, brother of Le Grand," said Mario, again striking the table.

The curtain rose and an aged man clad in costly robes seemed to advance to the very edge of the recess.

"Count Mario! as I saw him in the picture at Florence," gasped St. John, with difficulty restraining a cry. "But this image is alive! its eyes flash and move—it raises its hand—ho! there is some sorcery here."

"Go not at midnight to meet Rosetta, the Wine Seller's Daughter," said the image, pointing at St. John; who, as he heard these words, drew his sword, crying:

"This is too much, old man. Let me leave this den of trickery!"

"You are warned! Harm not Rosetta, or the deed, though it be but a scratch, will haunt you in the hell to which all such as you are doomed," said the man in the recess, who was none other than Benditto.

Victor St. John, though startled almost to a panic, snatched a pistol from his sash, and was in the act of raising it to fire when the apartment was made as dark as midnight in the twinkling of an eye.

"Hit or miss!" cried St. John, firing the pistol at random, and then slashing around him with his sabre. "Make light, old wizard! or I'll have your house torn down about your ears! Light I say!"

The apartment was illuminated in an instant. Mario stood

as calmly as if nothing had happened, but the curtain had fallen over the recess.

"Old man," said St. John, with his voice trembling with rage, "you have presumed too far upon your years. Before I leave you I will give you a warning, you know too much! Do you know what that means. But there are some things you do not know, and which I will teach you ere long. What means this warning as regards Rosetta? Speak!"

"Signor Captain, I cannot hear what is said by these phantoms. They address themselves to the minds of those interested," said Mario, solemnly.

St. John grated the word "Liar!" from his set teeth, and tossing his sabre into the scabbard, threw on his cloak, grasped the sack of gold and strode into the hall.

"Open your infamous door, Benditto," said he fiercely

Then as Mario complied in silence and swung the door wide open, the stalwart conspirator pointed to three masked and cloaked men, standing on the pavement, near the threshold, and said in a deep growling tone of menace:

"Count Mario di Antelli is no match for Henri Le Grand! Good night."

The eyes of the two men met for an instant in a fierce and deadly stare, and then St. John strode away followed by his vigilant satellites.

Mario closed the door and staggered back into the Chamber of Oracles.

Benditto sprang from the recess, clad in the rich dress of the Florentine nobleman.

"He has declared himself Benditto, and avowed his recognition of me," said Mario. "Benditto, he is not a man; he is a demon. Ah, that my son, Conrad, had lived. I am old, feeble—a weak old man, and you, Benditto—"

"I will own wit this villain or die at his feet," said Benditto, fiercely. "Yadak has returned."

"And Dufau?"

"Is our prisoner. Yadak had no trouble in taking him, as Dufau issued from the company of his friends alone, just as Yadak returned to the spot. Yadak felled him with a single blow, gagged and brought him here—entering from the rear. But Dufau recovered on the way and threw something far from him. By its clink as it struck upon the pavement Yadak thought it was a coin."

“He fears detection as a conspirator,” said Mario, “and sought to rid himself of all proof of complicity. The loss can be remedied, as we have the same coin and of the same date. I will engrave the secret sign above its date. But now let us visit our prisoner.”

CHAPTER XII.

THE WINE-SELLER.

WHILE the Florentines examine their prisoner, the unprincipled Louis Dufau, let us return to Viola's lover, the noble minded Henry Allison.

Accompanied by the Sergeant and one follower, he rode at full speed to the mansion of Col. Hartly; and was there informed that the Colonel was visiting at Monsieur Valle's—Henry's grandfather. The party were soon at Mons. Valle's hospitable home, and at the first summons the old French gentleman came to the door.

"Ab, my son," exclaimed Valle', "are you there! Ride on to your mother—my daughter has been very ill, but better this evening. What news from the camp? And where is the General, your father?"

"I have just left my mother, my dear grand-father," said Henry. "My father is with her. We fear she is dying—"

"Ha—dying! Jean! Rupert! my carriage you rascals?" cried the alarmed grand-father. "Make haste, everybody! Quick! my dear Laurette dying!"

"Is Col. Hartly here?" asked Henry.

"I am here, Captain," said the Colonel advancing upon the piazza. "You saw Viola then, did you not?"

"She is not there now, sir," replied Henry.

"Not there?" exclaimed Hartly. "I and my friend Valle' accompanied her there little more than an hour or so ago?"

"Where is your carriage to-night?" asked Henry.

"In a stable on Toulouse street, my dear boy. An accident compelled Viola to leave it in the street and Cuba, our black driver, placed it in an empty stable or carriage-shed, the nearest at hand. One of the horses died in the street, the other Cuba led to my house."

"And Clarke, your white driver?"

"Has not let his bed this week—from a sprained ankle, Henry. What do you mean by all these question? Good Heaven! has anything happened to Viola."

"Something very dreadful, Colonel," replied Henry. "She has disappeared under very suspicious circumstances."

Henry then related the story, and as he concluded the veteran bowed his head and said piously :

"She is in thy keeping, 'Oh Lord! The child of my old age! And lost!"

"Take heart, my noble friend!" cried Valle', as his carriage swept around from the rear to the gate. "Come, we will hurry to our friend Paul, the wine-seller. Did you say Carlos, the Spaniard! Why, life of my soul! that fellow is one of the friends of Victor St. John, whom I have ever despised."

"Victor St. John!" exclaimed Henry. "Ride back Sergeant—find that gentleman—arrest him. If my suspicions prove groundless I will give him any and every satisfaction."

"Victor St. John!" thought Col. Hurty, as he entered Valle's carriage. "The man had vengeance in his eye when I forbade him to enter my house again. If my poor child is in his power she is lost! Guard her, God of Heaven!"

"Drive, Rupert! drive like the wind to Monsieur Paul's saloon!" shouted Valle'. "Ah—I forgot—my daughter is living—yours is lost—but to the saloon first."

The carriage rolled away rapidly, and Henry Allison spurred his wearied horse to keep pace with it.

Within a very short time the party reached Paul's saloon.

"Consult Paul, my friends," said Valle'. "He has much good sense as well as more bad wine. I must hasten to my dear Henriette. Rupert, are you awake, scoundrel! Take up Dr. Montaigne on the way to Gen. Allison's."

Again the carriage rolled away, while Henry and Colonel Hurty hurried into the saloon.

Paul Amar was standing behind the bar, for the number of his customers had not diminished, as the saloon was a kind of headquarters for news, and the general impression was that the British would attack on the morrow. The wine-seller, as he served his patrons bestowed a continuous torrent of abuse upon his absent nephew, Louis Dufau, who had slipped away the instant Paul returned from the fortune-teller's.

"We wish to see you a moment in private," said Henry, as he leaned over the counter.

"Ho! is it you Captain Henry! Then the British will not fight just yet, for I'll bet my head against a pint of claret."

that you will be in the field. What news from the camp, Captain?"

"All's well, Paul; but step aside with us for a moment," replied Henry.

"With pleasure, Captain—but I must call upon some of my friends to take my place—you see that rascally nephew of mine, Louis Dufau, has gone sky-larking somewhere, and left me up to my eyes in trouble. The noble citizens are rarely thirsty to-night. Karl—and you Pretal—please attend to the bar. Now Captain please to follow me—and you also Col. Hartly. I have a cozy little parlor above where we may talk with ease."

He left the saloon in the care of two of his humble patrons, and opening the door behind the bar preceded his two friends up the stair-case, and into a small but neatly furnished apartment.

"Seat yourselves, gentlemen—now can I be of any service to you?"

Colonel Hartly related the strange disappearance of his daughter, and as he concluded by mentioning his suspicions of Victor St. John, the wine-seller sprang to his feet almost shouting:

"True! Victor St. John is doubtless the rascal. Do you think? The rascal has attempted to gain a secret meeting this night with my daughter, Rosetta!"

Paul had forgot that nothing but a thin and papered partition separated the little parlor from the bed room of his wretched daughter, who had been sitting in an agony of thought ever since her return from the fortune-teller's.

She had heard the heavy tramp of her father as he led his visitors up the stairs and into the parlor; but had given little heed to the indistinctly heard conversation, until the leathern-lungs of the wrathful wine-seller uttered the name of her lover, and coupled it with her own.

"They are talking of us," thought Rosetta, gliding from her seat to the partition, and placing her rosy little ear against a crack, from which the paper, had parted in drying.

"A meeting with your daughter!" exclaimed Henry. "The scoundrel!"

"A Judas! a Herod! a— a-what shall I call him," roared Paul, smiting his hands together. "But listen—I have put Benditto upon his track—Benditto will slay him before dawn.

"Oh my soul!" thought Rosetta. "He has been to the fortune-teller's—they mean to kill Victor—my noble Victor!"

"Beneditto promised to take care of the rascal," resumed Paul. "But I shall look out for him. You see he will prow! about the Place D'Armes at twelve to night, hoping to meet my crazy-brained Rosetta—who has no more wit than an oyster. Now, I shall meet him there—"

"Ah!" sighed Rosetta, "you will be there?"

"And by the blood of my body, gentlemen, Paul Amar will give him such a drubbing that he shall send for my friend, Dr. Burritt, to set every bone in his vile carcass."

"But in the meantime we must rescue Viola," said Col. Hartly.

"What!" thought Rosetta, growing cold and terrified. "Has Victor possession of that proud Viola?"

"Yes, we must to the rescue of Miss Hartly," said Paul, thoughtfully. "But who can tell where St. John has concealed her?"

"It is my opinion that he will not injure Miss Hartly, at least, not to-night, for he has too much business on hand—he has to meet my Rosetta! The rascal! to carry off two girls in one night."

"I think Paul is right," remarked Henry to Col. Hartly. "Viola will suffer much in mind, but her person will be respected for a time."

"Be assured that he intends to make Miss Hartly his wife," said Paul. "He knows that the Captain there, not to speak of Col. Hartly and his sons—will kill him on sight, unless he can say, 'She is my wife, it is not a crime to marry!'"

Rosetta bit her lip until it bled, to keep from crying out. If Victor St. John meant to marry Viola Hartly what were his intentions towards her!

At that moment Rosetta could have stabbed her pretended lover—and then herself.

"Nearly two hours must pass before we can capture St. John, even if he keeps the appointment with Rosetta," remarked Colonel Hartly, pacing the floor in anguish of soul. "What outrages may not be committed in two hours!"

"Calm yourself, my dear Colonel," said Henry. "I shall not be idle in that time."

"But what can you do?" cried Col. Hartly. "This St.

John is a serpent whose hiding places are known to himself alone."

"This audacity," remarked Paul, "makes me think that the explosion of the rumored plot to sack the city, is much nearer than we imagine. Thunder! the blow will be struck before day-light, for St. John will not dare show his face in New Orleans after this crime, for no doubt he has done it—that Carlos is his shadow."

"Carlos!" thought Rosetta. "The black-bearded man who kisses his hand to me—a beast! Ah, this cannot be true!"

"This is my plan," said Henry. "I must return to the camp before dawn, for there is every reason to believe that the enemy is already moving in his camp to give battle before sunrise. Our scouts have warned us, and whatever my feelings may be I must lead my company to-morrow. But in the meantime I will lay down my life to serve Viola Hartly. Let all search be made for Victor St. John, and such failing Paul and I will meet him at midnight. Let the patrols scour the city unceasingly until dawn, arresting every one found abroad and taking him to Col. Hartly's house for examination, unless some one in the arresting party shall vouch for the prisoner. It is now later than ten—yes, quarter of eleven. In one hour and a quarter Victor St. John will be a prisoner or a corpse—"

Rosetta now longed for a dagger to stab Henry, who talked so calmly of killing her lover.

"Do you agree to this, my friend?" continued Henry:

"We must," sighed Col. Hartly.

"And in meantime I will take good care that Rosetta does not play me a trick and meet him after all. Ah! she has heard all!" exclaimed Paul, suddenly recollecting the thinness of the partition.

He bounded from the parlor into the hall and attempted to open his daughter's door. It was locked.

"Rosetta—open!"

No answer; and the wine-seller dashed in the door with a savage blow of his knee. The room was empty! Rosetta was gone, and the open window showed the means of her sudden escape.

Paul uttered a loud cry and thrust his head from the window.

"She has gone! The leap to the ground could not harm

her—she is as active as a squirrel! I can see nothing! Ah, my child! my child!”

The stout-hearted wine-seller sank upon a sofa and sobbed aloud. He of course had no idea of the time Rosetta had been gone—he supposed she had fled immediately after his stormy interview. Capt. Allison and Col. Hartly, who had followed him into the room, respected his grief and turned their faces aside.

When Paul Amar raised his face it was terrific in its ghastliness, and his eyes were fiery and blood-shot.

“Gentlemen,” said he hoarsely, “I am going mad! If my daughter comes near me now I would kill her!”

“Not so, my worthy friend,” said Col. Hartly, placing his hand upon the unhappy man’s shoulder. “Do you not know that something remains to fathers who have been robbed of their daughters?”

“You mean resignation!” cried Paul, vacantly. “No—it remains for me to die. I have nothing more to live for now!”

The agony of the unfortunate father was terrible, and unless some sudden and startling change should be given to his thoughts that agony would speedily end in quick death.

“Resignation after vengeance!” whispered Col. Hartly, in a tone which showed how his blood was boiling with hate, despite his years and long worn dignity.

Paul Amar sprang to his feet with a roar, like that of a lion aroused from his sleep.

“Right, Colonel! Thanks for the word! Yes, vengeance remains—though,” continued he with a horrible laugh, “perhaps the bitterest vengeance I could take upon Victor St. John would be to let him have free play to deceive Rosetta.”

His astonished friends exchanged glances of alarm.

Was the wine-seller already mad?

“I say,” continued Paul, looking to the priming of his pistols, and speaking from his teeth, “that the most terrible revenge man can heap upon the soul of man is, to suffer him to make love to his own child.”

Col. Hartly recoiled from the ferocious scowl of the wine-seller, and muttered: “He is mad! His grief has turned his brain.”

“I am not mad, gentlemen,” said Paul, stealthily. “I am as sane as you—I have been mad not to have said to Rosetta, ‘Do not love Victor St. John, my child, for he is your father!’”

And if that had failed I should have said: 'And the assassin of your mother!'"

"But St. John—" exclaimed Henry.

"Believes she is my child—therefore to me belongs vengeance. Let us go and seek it." With these words the wine-seller left the room followed by his friends.

As the sound of their footsteps died away, and as a shout in the saloon announced that Paul was a popular man among his patrons below, a white and ghastly face, with great staring black eyes peered from behind the crimson curtains of the vacant bed, and then Rosetta sprang to the centre of the apartment.

She had been concealed—she had effected a successful stratagem—and she had heard terrible things.

"My father! Victor my father! Am I dreaming! Is not Paul Amar my father! Was not his wife my mother! Great Heaven, what is all this mystery! Hark! it is striking eleven. In one hour Victor St. John, lover or father, will be a corpse unless I warn him! My father! Impossible. Paul Amar is my father, and my supposed flight has driven him mad as he said it would. Victor murdered my mother! Impossible! My mother died two years ago, and then I had never seen Victor St. John! No, my father is mad—and will kill Victor. I will save him, for all he loves Viola, and then—and then—well then, I will die."

Having said this, Rosetta sprang from the open window and vanished in the pitchy night, saying to her heart:

"I will save you or die with you, my Victor!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CONSPIRATORS

VICTOR ST. JOHN after leaving the fortune-teller's passed rapidly through street after street, followed at a distance by his satellites, until he reached the house in which Viola Hartly was a captive. Then turning to those who followed him he gave a peculiar whistle from his tube which was answered up and down the street at regular intervals and pauses.

"Nineteen," said St. John as he tallied the signals upon his lips. "The tally is correct." Then unlocking the door he passed in and carefully barred and bolted the entrance.

"Raymond," said he, as he stood in the hall, which was now dimly lighted.

Raymond was not visible, but after a series of growls, oaths and scuffles in a dark corner, that amiable gentleman crawled into the light from under a table.

"What were you doing there, old hedgehog?" demanded St. John, who was by no means in an amiable mood.

"In the first place have you the, gold, my warlike hero?" asked Raymond.

"You are insolent! What if I have not?"

"Then your fine plot caves in. You've 'ad visitors, my Captin," said Raymond. "You as 'em this munit. They're in the League Hall. Two ferocious visitors as wants money. There's a rat hole in the wall under that table and its been a recreation, hit 'as, to listen to the remarks of them visitors." Raymond was snuffing his paws again.

"Who are they? and what do they want?"

"Two chiefs of the League, my Captin and they wants gold. They say they won't hact with yer after this night neither without the gold—they can't keep the brethren satisfied—they re willin' to stand by ye—but the brethren want gold."

"Confound them. They'll have gold and blood enough before morning," said St. John. "The blow will be struck before dawn."

"Pervided yer 'aves 'ands enough to strike hevery vere, Captin."

"What do you mean?"

"The brethren want money down—on the nail—or they don't hact."

"So—I will see these visitors. How is it with the young ady?"

"She's all right up stairs—and my lovely Marbel is exhibitin' herself in the room hevery three minutes—the Princess is hall afc—so she wouldn't 'ave ye Captin?"

Raymond lathered his visage all over with this fact, up to his eyes, over the nose and under the chin—eyeing the captain sleepfully.

"Away with you!" cried St. John, dealing him a smart blow on the head with the sack of gold.

"Gold! He's got gold by the bags-full!" exclaimed Raymond, and this fact gave him such intense delight that he rubbed himself from his heels to his head with it—bathed in it—sponged himself all over with it. "He's a Juke of Dimints—is the warlike Captin? Hooray for the Juke of Dimints and the Queen of 'arts?—which is hup habove with Marbel, which is the Queen of Clubs."

St. John passed through the hall and then through several empty rooms, finally pausing before a door. There he beckoned to Raymond to keep near him and then entered.

The door gave him noiseless admittance into an alcove, which contained a dais, raised three feet from the level of the floor, and sheltered by heavy damask curtains.

The apartment was large, and furnished with scores of strong chairs and a few small tables. By one of these tables sat two dark looking men, who were so earnestly engaged in conversation that the entrance of the captain was unobserved. They sat near the wall, which there divided the hall of the mansion from the great saloon, or as it was called by the conspirators, the League Hall.

"Well, my friends," said St. John after staring at them contemptuously, though the expression changed instantly to one of cordiality as the men sprang to their feet.

"Ah! We are glad to see you, Captain!" cried one of them.

"Thank you Mapes, and you too Sheil," said St. John. "How stands the League now?"

"Impatient, Captain," replied he who answered to the name of Shiel. "The bands are murmuring at this long delay."

"Do they not know that it would be ruin for us to act before Pakenham gives the signal?" demanded St. John. "Do they think that Andrew Jackson is unable to fall back upon the city and hang every man of them. They must be patient until Pakenham gives Jackson employment below."

"Patience is a virtue they do not possess, and even if the blow were to be struck to-night," said Mapes, "many of them refuse to act until paid the sum they have been promised."

"They shall be paid. Read the numbers of the bands with their men," said St. John.

Shiel produced a paper and read as follows:

- | | | |
|--------|----------|--------------------------|
| No. 1. | Captain, | 20—paid—Ready. |
| " 2. | Mapes, | 20—not paid—Mutinous. |
| " 3. | Carlos, | 20—paid—Ready. |
| " 4. | Shiel, | 35—half paid—Unreliable. |
| " 5. | Gemmi, | 40—not paid—Doubtful. |
| " 6. | Tarrant, | 80—Blacks, paid—Ready. |
| " 7. | Vitelli, | 60—half paid—Doubtful. |
| " 8. | Clare, | 75— " " " |

Total, 350."

"And what amount will satisfy the rascals?" demanded St. John.

"Not less than five thousand dollars," replied Shiel.

"It is now quarter of eleven," said St. John. "The captains and officers of the League are to meet here at quarter past eleven. Let it be known as speedily as possible that I have the gold on hand to double their demands—and will do it. Where are the bands?"

"All are in meetings at their different quarters awaiting your answer," replied Shiel.

"So much the better. Convene the officers as soon as possible," continued St. John as he turned to leave the hall, from which Mapes and Shiel immediately departed.

St. John deposited the sack of coin in a small chest upon the dais and said to Raymond:

"Go guard the front door. I have much writing to do in my office."

Raymond hobbled away while St. John hastened to the

apartment where he kept his private papers, and having locked the door threw off his cloak and seated himself at a desk. He studied a map of the city a few minutes and then thought aloud :

“ It must succeed. Pakenham sends me word that he will attack Jackson at daybreak. The fight will be bloody but brief, for the American rabble cannot withstand the charge of those British veterans. Pakenham demands that we shall fire the city at midnight, so that a portion of Jackson's force shall be detached from the main body to rescue the city. But this does not suit me, for that detached force would play havoc with the mere handful of mercenaries at my command. The revolt might be quelled by half a thousand of Adair's Kentuckians. No— let the battle begin—we shall hear the cannon plainly here. Then I will let loose my men for plunder and rapine. Jackson will have more than he can do to resist the British, and will not be able to spare a single company for the city. The battle below is to open just before dawn. I will give the signal to fire and sack one hour before that time, and long ere Jackson can receive intelligence of it New Orleans shall be in a sheet of flame. The consternation of the few fighting men here will be the only thing thought of. The city shall be well plundered before Pakenham has a hand in the plucking. I shall have my choice of the *Beauty of Bogty*, before his veteran thieves of the Peninsular can arrive. What shall I do with my prisoners? I will take no more than I have. I have Viola—let Carlos look after the wine-seller's daughter. How did that Italian Count discover that I am to meet to Rosetta at midnight? How did he track me to New Orleans. So he tricked me into a legal marriage with his daughter! I think I have had the best of it so far, and will to the very end. I shall make it a pleasure to knock Count Marjo on the head. I am sorry for that little beauty of the saloon, and were it not for Viola—but no—there is something about that Rosetta which reminds me of Clara Antelli, of Florence. And that father of Rosetta—that wine-seller, Paul—where have I seen him—or some one like him, years and years ago? This ruffian, Carlos, loves Rosetta—the brute! He to love such a flower—a mere bud. And she loves me—poor thing—believes I love her! I, to love a mere child like that! She has served my purpose so far, for Viola is in my power, and without Carlos I could have done little, whether in

love or plot. But my word is pledged to ensnare Rosetta for Carlos."

He arose and paced the floor with uneasy strides, muttering:

"I would balk the villain if I could. Poor Rosetta—she loves me—she believes me as immaculate as a god, whereas I am an incarnate devil, judged by godly men. I am to meet her at twelve—she will fly to my arms—the girl is as chaste as snow, and I must use all my arts to persuade her to elope with me—having succeeded I must give up the confiding, innocent child to the mercy of the ruffian, Carlos. It is terrible! I see her tearful eyes, hear her pleading voice, feel her arms thrown around me, clinging to me for protection! Horrible! I cannot do it. Now that Viola is mine I shrink from the unholy compact. It seems that I am still human."

He paused in his pace, for his quick ear heard the sound of voices below.

"It is Carlos—he has hurried from his affairs to press this matter. He is coming to demand his portion of the game. I have used the villain to the accomplishment of my purposes—why should I be used by him to gain his ends? The rascal would betray me if he dared. I am warned not to attempt to injure Rosetta—the warning seems like a voice from the grave. I must incur great peril to ensnare the girl, for my purpose seems known. I will break the compact. I will not move in the matter. And if Carlos dares scowl upon my decision—let him look well to his life. The ruffian affects a disgusting familiarity already, and Mapes has warned me that he seeks to be the leader of the League. *He my rival!*"

Some one knocked at the door, and St. John opened it at once.

"How sets the wind now, brave Captain?" said Carlos, as he swaggered in.

"Fair for good men, and foul for traitors," replied St. John sternly.

"So much the better, Captain, for us good men. Do you know that it is after eleven!"

"And what if it is?"

"What if it is? Why much, my Captain. There remains a bird to be caught—the bargain is not yet all shipshape on your part. It is time you were cruising after Rosetta, the wine-seller's daughter."

"Time enough for that," replied St. John. "Nor am I

accustomed to being schooled by any man when to act."

"Carlos gave a lurch and a reel that swung him face to face with his accomplice.

"Speak out, Captain, do you mean to say that you will not catch my bird for me?"

"Catch your own birds, my gay Spaniard, and remember where you are, and to whom you speak. You have been my ally, but not my equal," said St. John haughtily.

"You wish to back out of the compact," growled Carlos "and so try to pick a quarrel with me. Come, you are not on shore yet. There is time to bring a regiment of sabres from Jackson's camp."

"You will dare attempt to betray!" exclaimed St. John with a dangerous gleam from his keen blue eyes.

"I say I can and dare, if you play me false," replied Carlos, boldly. "If you break your agreement with me there is no honor among thieves, and I leave you."

"That is if you can."

"If I can? Who will stop me?" demanded Carlos, drawing his pistol quickly.

"That," said St. John, calmly and pointing towards the open door.

Carlos turned and beheld Raymond with a carbine leveled at his head.

"Aha! So—so!" muttered Carlos glancing from master to man. "He is a devil, as the men all believe. I must wait for a better chance."

"If he stirs, Raymond, shoot him down," cried St. John.

"Aye," growled Raymond. "The swaggering pirate kicked me last night. Be sure he did not pop 'im between the ears or the hoys. But he brought a lady with him, Captain."

"A lady? Where is she? Who is she?"

Carlos replaced his pistol and laughed mockingly.

"I will tell you who she is, bold Captain, and then we'll be friends again, for I have put my oar in and must needs put with you," said he. "I have always doubted you, Captain about the girl, and been as jealous as a Turk when I saw how the girl loved you. As I was floating about the streets, a while back, hunting after Louis Dufau, who is missing, a petticoat dashed by and I grappled it, of course. She cried: 'Oh tell me where I may find Capt. St. John—for life and death!' So I conveyed her here. She didn't know me in the dark, for

growled out that I had money to pay the Captain and would show the way—it was just around the bend of the next street. She's very anxious to see you, Captain."

"Who is she?" demanded St. John, feeling uneasy.

"Well, she'll be called Senora Carlos Lollio soon, but at present her name is Rosetta, the wine-seller's daughter!"

"Great Heaven! She here!" exclaimed St. John, growing pale. "She shall be set at liberty immediately!"

"Perhaps not," said Carlos, coolly. "I hear the sound of the Leaguers as they enter the empty house alongside. A yell from me, or the report of that carbine Old Porcupine is handling, will bring them here. There is a law of the League which reads somewhat after this wise: 'No B. & B.—Beauty or Booty—shall be restored from the League, when once claimed by a brother, without the consent of every member of the League, and the penalty of violating this decree shall be death.' That's the sense of it, though not the lingo. You see what don't please one may please another, and should you change your mind about your bird, Viola, why there'll be plenty to claim her, eh?"

St. John shuddered as he reflected upon the possible fate of Viola. If in the coming onslaught he should fall by intended or chance blow, Viola would become the prey of the first ruffian that should lay hands on her.

"Where is Rosetta?" he asked.

"Chatting with the dainty Viola," said Carlos. "I put her in Marbel's charge, and told the she dragon to let her have a talk with the bird. You see Viola will soon let the cat out of the bag."

"What cat?"

"Why, that we made a lovely bargain—girl for girl—wife for wife—for I intend to make Rosetta a dutiful and affectionate husband," said Carlos. "Rosetta, by this time hates you more than she ever loved—that's my policy."

"The League is ready to enter the hall," said Raymond.

"Let us go with the League," said St. John. "After that, Carlos, we will attend to other matters."

"As you please," replied Carlos, swaggering after the Captain, and eyeing Raymond's carbine scornfully.

CHAPTER XIV.

ROSETTA AND VIOLA.

ROSETTA was a prisoner, chance had thrown her in the way of Carlos, who was not slow to make the most of circumstance. He was an exceedingly dangerous villain because he was not only vigilant, but as rapid as thought in using every advantage.

When Rosetta sprang from her bed room window she lighted unharmed upon her hands and feet in the grassy yard below, and then ran on through the little garden which in those days surrounded the rear of the wine-seller's house—now that garden has disappeared to make room for a pistol gallery.

Easily escaping from the garden into the back street Rosetta ran on without knowing in what direction she was running, for as she believed she was pursued her only thought was to elude her father.

After running for some time, she found herself upon the bank of the great river, whose bend there has given a poetical name to the city of New Orleans, and after becoming convinced that she was not pursued she sat down to regain breath.

The mighty Mississippi rolled its dark and dangerous volume swiftly on, scarcely seen, but with its majestic rush of waters distinctly heard, and Rosetta, as she gazed upon the gloom of its grandeur wished that she lay cold and drowned beneath its waves.

"He is false—as false can be," she murmured giving free vent to her tears and sobs, for who was to hear or see her there. "Oh Victor! How I have loved thee! Ah, love thee yet—though all proves thee base, treacherous—infamous. Have I not driven my poor doting father mad for thee, Victor? Is it not better for me to leap into this voiceless river and end my soul's anguish forever? Forever? Ah, there is the fearful hereafter!—and suicides? What is their punishment? I dare not—I dare not die by my own act—but oh Heaven! would that I might now die! Better had I died before I saw thee, Victor! They seek thy life, Victor—my mad father,

that cold and merciless Hartly—the outraged father of Viola—and he—Allison—her lover—so fierce in fight—he longs to slay thee! I must try to save thee—but how can I tell where to seek thee? I cannot stay here—every minute seems an age of agony—and yet how little time have I left to war with thee!”

She arose and ran back into the city, hoping, praying for aid from Heaven. Wandering thus at random, and hiding from the sentinels, who seemed unusually active, she was rushing near Carlos when the villain arrested her by grasping her dress.

When she spoke he knew her by her voice; and disguising his voice decoyed her into the house of St. John. He left her to the guidance of Marbel and, as we have seen, pushed on for an interview with St. John—it being his traitorous intention if he found the captain backward, to carry Rosetta from the house and let the plot go on or fall through without him.

But the powerful Captain's sleepless vigilance had prevented this, and we have seen him reluctantly following St. John to the convention of the League.

Meanwhile Marbel, who seldom opened her skinny lips save to curse, led the miserable Rosetta into the presence of Viola.

“Viola Hartly!” exclaimed Rosetta, as that lady rose from the sofa upon which she was lying. “I wish to see Captain St. John.”

“Rosetta,” cried Viola, in open-eyed astonishment. “Oh fly from this dangerous place or you are ruined—fly at once.

“She can't and she shan't!” said Marbel placing her giantess form between Rosetta and the door.

“Ah! Then you too are a prisoner,” cried Viola in accent of pity.

“I a prisoner! No—I came here of my own free will,” replied Rosetta, but growing pale as she noted Marbel's sardonic grin.

“You have been ensnared, poor girl,” said Viola, taking Rosetta's hands in hers. “Ah, you have been bought by the wiles of Victor St. John and sold by his villainy to that monstrous pirate, Carlos, the Spaniard. Rosetta, do you love Captain St. John?”

“What right have you to ask that question?” demanded Rosetta, flushing scarlet to the temples.

Viola replied with a mournful smile:

“Rosetta, I wish to be your friend; will you let me be your friend, Rosetta?”

“Oh, I know he loves you, and I cannot but hate you—but for you he would love me,” exclaimed the passionate Rosetta.

“You should not hate me, Rosetta, but him. Listen, he has bartered you for me. He has promised Carlos to give you to him, if Carlos would aid him in abducting me. How came you here?”

Rosetta’s haughtiness melted beneath the kind and sisterly regard of the lovely speaker, and she rapidly told all.

“Was it not Carlos who came here with this lady?” demanded Viola of Marbel.

“The man that led me hither wore a cloak which he held over his face,” said Rosetta. “Ah, it was Carlos—I was mad not to know him. Women!” she cried, facing Marbel. “Let me pass out—and do you tell Victor St. John that I hate and loathe him. It was a crime to deceive me, but to sell me—and—and—my love—horrible! Let me pass!”

“Stand back, young woman! or I’ll tie ye. Don’t scowl: me sparrow! I’d mash yer to bits in a minit with these,” cried Marbel, opening and clenching her long, lean fingers, garnished with sharp black nails. “I’d tear yer pretty taw into bloody ribbons for my Sunday bonnet. I’ve tamed a brave pullets as either of ye afore—and for the Captain too!”

“For *him*! Oh, my God!” groaned poor Rosetta. “Ah, I have loved him!”

She sank into a heap upon the floor, and buried her face in her hands.

“What’s the splutter,” croaked Marbel. “You can’t be have the Captin’, and to my thinkin’ he’s fonder of blue eyes than black—though his taste is not perfect. Take it easy, ye little one. The Captin’ may change his mind and take to ye and give the yellow haired one to jolly bold Carlos.”

“Oh what a monster!” cried the unhappy girls, flying into each other’s arms, terrified by the malignant spite of the haughty Marbel.

“Carlos is not such a handsome lad as the Captin’—sic like is hard to find—but Carlos is free with his gold and always has plenty of it. After all, my pretty ones, yer safer here to-night, than ye’d be at home—I kin tell yer that!”

“Wretch! What do you mean!” exclaimed Rosetta.

“None o’ them names to, this!” replied Marbel ferocious

"Ye'd better get on my blind side from the beginning—I tell ye that—for when ye'll begin to wither, and wilt, and pine, and moan ye'll need a friend to console ye—for the Captain never loves anybody long—don't I know? I've been nigh him these ten years—here and there and everywhere."

"And I loved him," moaned poor Rosetta, burying her face in Viola's bosom. "Oh how I hate him now!"

"Why you're nothing but a fast-grown child," continued Marbel, "and it is hard that the Captain should have stolen yer little mite of a heart to give ye to jolly bold Carlos—I know its hard, and I'll have a talk with the captain 'sarning that. I like's you little one, better than I do that blue eyed one, for all she's so proud. If I have any say, the captain'll take ye and let her go to jolly bold Carlos."

The unfortunate girls made no reply, to this horrible speech, and Marbel continued:

"I said ye're safer here this night than ye'd be at yer homes. To-night is to be a dreadful night for New Orleans. Here—see here," she said, going to one end of the room and cautiously raising a window, the shutters of which were closed lattice-work. "This house was built first, and then a big dancing-room was built agin it—this winder opens right in the old dancing room, and if he will come ye may hear and see what's hatching agin New Orleans—come it won't hurt ye, and will take yer minds from the little misery its natural ye'd be feelin' in a strange place."

"Come," said Viola to Rosetta, "the woman speaks truly. It will be a relief to us till the time comes around for our rescue."

"Shall we be rescued?" pleaded Rosetta, who seemed prostrated by the wreck of her heart's first love.

"I know we shall be rescued?" replied the heroine Viola. "I have a God in Heaven, a father, and brothers and a lover on earth!"

"I have no brothers," moaned Rosetta. "I have driven my father mad—for that God will punish me—and alas! I have no lover now!"

She wept bitterly and wrung her hands in despair.

"Keep yer cryin' for after times," snarled Marbel, "come, the hall is all alight now, and from here ye can have a full view of Captain St. John on the throne."

Rosetta sprang to the lattice and shot one keen glance into

the hall below; then covering her eyes she crouched upon the floor moaning:

"It is Victor—and he smiles on Carlos! Oh great Heaven, how I have been betrayed!"

Viola was not content with a single glance, but turned eye and ear upon the scene below.

The hall was not brilliantly lighted, yet a single lamp, which burned upon a table near the dais upon which St. John was seated, revealed the features of the handsome chief of the conspirators.

Carlos stood near the Captain, and about thirty men were in the hall, and more were coming in at intervals.

Viola could perceive that each new-comer made some secret sign and gave a password, though all wore masks, save Carlos and St. John.

One by one as they entered, the conspirators advanced to the centre of the hall, and cried out some number included between 1,500 and 1,600, and at the same time dropped a coin into a small box.

"So, Master Dufau has found himself," muttered Carlos as the number 1784 was called out by a mask. "I am not surprised, for I have always mistrusted the rascal."

St. John, keen watchful and sharp eared, kept his steady gaze upon No. 1784, as he moved and finally sat down in the shadow off one of the pillars which sustained the floor above.

The Captain said nothing, but a ferocious gleam of malice and exultation shone in his eyes for an instant, and then his face grew cold and stern.

At length the sentinel at the narrow entrance door announced that no more were to come, and St. John arose.

"Friends," he began, "we have now met for the last time before the striking of the blow. We have no time to waste in deliberation, for our course is decided. Some of you have demanded gold."

A loud murmur arose from the assembly, which now numbered over fifty.

"Well, I have gold. Here are ten thousand dollars in coin. Let the Captain of each band advance, and take his portion for distribution among his troop. When we meet again our number may be less, but our booty will be more.

"Beauty and Booty!" said the assembly in a subdued shout.

as eight or ten masks advanced to receive the gold from the chief.

This affair was soon concluded, and St. John continued:

“Let it be well and carefully remembered by all, especially by the officers of the bands, that the signal for the onslaught can be given only by me, and that signal will be the firing of the cannon on the roof of this house. You will hear its report between the hours of two and three. Upon hearing it let your look-outs wait for the signal of rockets, which will immediately follow the firing of the cannon. Do not act upon a cannon’s report alone, for some chance might discharge one by other hands than mine—from your various stations you can easily see the firing of a rocket on this roof. Having seen that, go to work at once. You will have more allies than you suppose, for I have not been idle. You will know your friends in the dark by the watchword, ‘Beauty and Booty,’ and by a white scarf across the breast. Let the torch be applied in every League chamber, first of all, to the prepared combustible and use your torches in as many places as possible. The inscription ‘B. & B.’ has made known to you those places in which no fire must be used—use the sword as you will. A blunder, save silver and gold, must be unnoticed.”

“And jewels,” put in Carlos, with a grin.

“Jewels, of course, are a legal booty,” said St. John.

“And beauty?” again grinned Carlos.

“Look to booty first—beauty will be a drug in our market when the city is in ashes,” commanded St. John. “Gold, silver and jewels are to be brought here, for future distribution upon this square no torch must be touched.

I have advices from the British army which declare that they are now under arms, and preparing for immediate attack. One of the brethren of the League, now present, has just arrived from the British camp—here is the written message of the commander.”

He displayed a letter and read aloud:

“Act! We attack before dawn. The camp is in motion. Ten o’clock, 7th January, B. & B.”

“This was written by Pakenham himself.”

Another subdued shout from the eager conspirators.

“Let them fight it out,” thought St. John, as his cold and haughty eye flashed over the scene. “I shall not expose myself to the risk of a chance shot. If the plot succeeds—

at it. If it fails, let it; for my contract with the British government is to hold good in either case, so the attempt be made and proved. These ruffians will prove it. I must be ready to escape with Viola if the League is crushed—and that is almost an impossibility. I will give the signal; and like Nero, look on from the house top while Rome burns below."

The conspirator Mapes now unmasked and said:

"We have a traitor among us!"

"Point him out at once," cried St. John.

Mapes advanced to a conspirator and tore off his mask.

"Capt. Shiel!" exclaimed many voices.

"Look at his face and say if he is a true man," demanded Mapes, pointing at the ghastly pallor of the trembling wretch.

"I accuse him of intending to betray the League. He has now on his person a full description of the League, its purposes, the names of its members, places of meeting and everything connected with it. I discovered him in the act of sealing and addressing it to Andrew Jackson."

A score of hands nearly stripped the detected traitor of his clothing in the furious search for proofs of guilt.

The packet was found and delivered to St. John, who glanced over it and said:

"Our laws have provided for this matter. The penalty is death in the presence of the League."

"Spare me, Captain! Spare me, my friends—my treachery has not injure you," shrieked Shiel, falling upon his knees and glancing imploringly about him.

"You intended to destroy us. We punish for the attempt. Lower the cord," commanded St. John.

And now for the first time Viola, peering through the lattice, perceived an iron ring fastened by a bolt to the centre of the ceiling, and from it, running straight to the farther wall, and again down the wall to the floor, what seemed to be a broad, black line.

That line was a strong cord, not larger than a man's finger, but of tried and fatal strength.

This cord now began to descend from the ring to the floor, lowered by the merciless hands of a dozen conspirators, who contended for the post of vengeance.

"Stand back there!" commanded St. John. "There are regular officers for that duty."

The crowd retired from the wall, leaving the cord in the

grasp of two men, who threw off their masks and revealed two savage visages, one of a white man the other of a negro.

" Ah ! will they hang the wretch," cried Viola, as she saw four men seize the miserable man and drag him towards the centre of the room.

" Of course," snarled Marbel. " That's five the Captain has had hung up there to-day, this month."

" Help ! Mercy ! Murder ! Spare me !" screamed Shiel, as his executioners held him beneath the cord, which was coming down slowly ; writhing, twisting and twirling above the pitiable wretch as if it were a living viper exulting in the misery of its victim.

" Gag him !" exclaimed St. John, calmly, and in a moment the cries for mercy were forced down the traitor's throat, with a great wad of dry sponge, held in his gaping mouth by a cravat tied across his white and horrible face.

The doomed man already, suffered all the horrors of suffocation, for as the sponge became saturated with the moisture of his mouth and tongue it swelled in his jaws, and more than half strangled him.

He could not speak his prayers for mercy, but his rolling eyes and distorted features were alive with the speechless eloquence of despair.

" Spare him, Victor St. John !" cried Rosetta, horrified beyond all control, and dashing open the lattice. " Can you be so cruel !"

Her girl, she had recognized in the culprit a man who had once saved her life, by periling his to snatch her from beneath the hoofs of a runaway horse, not a year before. Unhappy Rosetta, her only fault was her love for that cruel and iron hearted Cataline, seated upon his conspirator throne in all the pride of merciless power.

Viola shrank from the glare of the fiery eyes that shot glances of wonder at the open window, and her heart beat thick and fast as a score of hoarse voices joined in the cry of :

" Rosetta, the Wine-Seller's Daughter !"

CHAPTER XI.

CLARA DI ANTELLI.

A DOZEN fierce ruffians drew their pistols, as if about to shoot at the beautiful face and bosom, leaning with outspread arms from the window, and shouted furiously:

“A spy! A spy!”

“Halt!” thundered St. John, springing to his feet. “She is no spy, my friends. She is sealed to Carlos.”

“Aye, Beauty and Booty!” growled Carlos.

Rosetta’s shrill scream of horror echoed through the hall at this proof of Victor’s fearful treachery, and she swooned in the arms of Marbel.

“And the other! the other?” roared one of the conspirators, as he caught sight of Viola’s pale face.

“Sealed to me!” exclaimed St. John. “Carlos and I have been at work already. This is our affair, and does not concern the League.”

“Aye,” cried Carlos, swaggering in triumph: “what says our law about such things—‘Every man catch his own birds.’”

A brutal laugh was the admiring answer.

“Swing up the traitor?” commanded St. John, desiring to turn the attention of the unruly satellites.

Shiel, who had flattered himself with sudden born hope, when Rosetta pleaded for him, now struggled with all a mad man’s strength, and though the noose was drawn about his neck he grappled the throat of Mapes as the cord was hurried upward, with the mad haste of brutal vengeance, and before those who were running across the hall with the other end of the rope could be checked, both Shiel and Mapes were swinging almost to the lofty ceiling. Shiel held by the cord and Mapes by the death-grip of Shiel.

“Lower away! Let loose! Let fall!” shouted Carlos.

But Shiel, fierce in his agonies and vindictive in dying, anticipated the rescue and suddenly let go his grasp, so that Mapes was precipitated headlong from a height of over twenty feet.

He fell with a crash and lay motionless on the floor.

"He is dead as a handspike," growled Carlos, turning the wretch over with no gentle hand. "We've lost one of our best men, my mates, and so there's an end of that."

"The next in command must head the two bands thus deprived of their leaders," remarked St. John, authoritatively. "Let the traitor swing there until we need the rope again; not I think the need is near. It is my turn to say, 'There is no traitor among us!'"

A sudden stillness fell upon all, and many shrank from the menacing glance of the chief, as it flashed here and there, as if seeking some one to denounce.

"To the test," continued St. John. "Let every man name his coin, himself, and unmask. A traitor may get into this hall but he cannot get out alive."

The conspirators fell back from the dais, and Carlos held the small box into which each man had dropped a coin after entering the hall.

One by one the conspirators advanced to the dais, unmasked, gave a number and name until but one man remained.

"Come forward, mask. Call for your coin, give its date, your name and unmask," said St. John sternly.

The mask advanced and spoke:

"I demand my golden passport in the name of the League."

"Right," said St. John.

"In right of its date, 1784."

"Right."

"And in the name of Louis Dufau."

"Unmask, and if you are he, seek it," continued St. John.

The applicant threw aside his mask and stood revealed.

"Benditto the fortune-teller!" exclaimed Carlos, while St. John stared upon the bold Italian with savage exultation.

"He is an interloper! A spy! Hang him!" shouted the conspirators.

"You hear your sentence, Benditto," said St. John. "Execution follows instantly—my very cunning Count Mario di Antelli, of Florence."

"Look I like Mario now!" exclaimed he whom we have thus far known as Benditto, casting off a wig of grizzly locks, his false eye brows and false beard, and at the same time rapidly passing a handkerchief over his face after dipping it in an urn of water near him.

“Am I Count Mario, my very cunning Henri Le Grand!”

But for a moment St. John seemed speechless with horror; and then after a wild stare of terror upon the face before him, he shrieked rather than exclaimed:

“Clara di Antelli! My wife!”

“Will you hang me now, Henri Le Grand? Shall the cord or the dagger finish the assassination poison failed to complete!” demanded Clara—for it was she, the original of the portrait of the Italian girl.

Captain St. John was in a tremor of terror and dismay. It seemed to him that his wife had suddenly sprung from the grave; still, the devilish audacity of the man finally came to his aid.

“You shall not hang, vindictive woman, though such boldness deserves no milder punishment.”

“Beware,” said Clara. “If I once dreamed that you, as you sit there, in this den of villains, could dare raise your hand against me, or speak to my injury you should die upon the instant. I have but to cross my hands above my head, and you die where you sit.”

St. John grew pale for all his boldness, and his eye wandered from face to face, as if seeking for the ambushed foe. He saw no covert violence in the astonished features about him, yet he knew the daring woman was not speaking falsely,

Had his eye been near enough to pierce through the deep shadow that enshrouded one corner of the large hall, and which obscured a crevice in the decaying wall, he would have seen Yadak's steady gaze, as he watched every motion of his mistress, and fingered impatiently with the trigger of a carbine; for crouching upon the floor of the adjacent deserted house, the Asiatic had noiselessly enlarged the crevice, made known by Louis Dufau's extorted confession—until he knew there would be room to use his weapon.

Of this terrible danger St. John knew nothing, but he was skilled in reading the expression of the human face, and knew, from the firm lips and steady eyes of Clara Antelli, that his life hung upon a thread.

“Comrades,” said he, turning to the amazed assembly, “this is a woman, and at some time during my life there was a connection between us which now commands me to interpose between her and your decree. Her life must be spared.”

“And where is Louis?” demanded a burly ruffian, stepping

forward. "Louis Dufau was my crouy—as gay a lark as ever chirped. Let this woman give us tidings of Dufau."

"Aye! Dufau! Life for life! Dufau!" shouted the conspirators pressing nearer to the dais.

Yadak's carbine was now leveled at the head of St. John, and had Clara raised her hands the conspirator would have died with a ball between his eyes.

But Clara remained motionless, and said calmly:

"Dufau's life depends upon mine. I do not value mine a feather's weight, or I would not have come here alone. If harm befalls me, Dufau will die a most horrible death."

"Who cares for him?" growled Carlos. "Let him die. If you go hence the league will be betrayed. Comrades, this is a woman, it seems; but blood of my life, she is a spy!"

"Hang the spy!" cried the assembly.

"I have said no!" thundered St. John, whose eyes had never wandered from Clara's, and who detected in its steady gleam a desperate resolve. He secretly trembled, for he saw she did not fear to die, and knew that courage arose from the consciousness of ability to slay him, even there amid his followers.

"She shall live," he continued. "But a prisoner."

An expression of satisfaction lighted up Clara's face—a face still beautiful, though sadly faded from the beauty of her youth.

"I am willing to be a prisoner," she said calmly. Then raising her voice to a louder tone she said, in Arabic:

"Let him who waits hasten to rescue!"

"What does that mean?" demanded St. John, who did not understand the words.

Clara smiled bitterly and replied:

"It means that I do not trust you."

"She has confederates," thought St. John, again rolling his searching glance from face to face. "Those confederates may balk the conspiracy. I must hasten the signal." Then to the assembly, "To your stations. Be ready. Await the signal—it may come sooner than you think."

"The sooner the better," cried the conspirators. "But the spy must hang."

"She shall, my friends, but not now. She shall die to-morrow."

"Who pledges his life for the life of the spy? The law of

the league demands the life of any one who takes a prisoner, if that prisoner shall escape before the blow falls," said Carlos.

"I pledge mine," replied St. John, and then muttered, "If she lives till dawn may ruin seize me. Let me be with her alone once again!"

"We accept the pledge," exclaimed Carlos, and forthwith resolved that he would free the prisoner, and so lay low his hated superior.

"I read your thoughts," mused St. John, as his eye dwelt for a moment upon the sinister visage of his second-in-command. "But if you can free her from the prison in which I shall place her you are welcome to my head."

The conspirators then hurried away, one by one, to meet at their respective stations, leaving St. John and Carlos with Clara.

"Why do you not go with your band?" demanded St. John.

"When I go I will take my bird with me, noble Captain," replied Carlos with a swagger and a leer.

"Come then, you shall take her," said St. John.

He turned as if about to open the small door behind him, when Carlos called out:

"Fair and easy, noble Captain. I must tell you that my twenty lads of thunder are waiting for me around this house, and have my orders to blow on the league if I am not with them within ten minutes. 'Put your helmet on when you put your head in a lion's jaws,' says the proverb. You understand. If you play me false, blood of my life, the net falls through."

"Carlos, when you cease to be of use to me, fear me," replied St. John with a mocking laugh. "I will lead the way you, madam, follow me. Carlos may go, come or stay."

"I am with you," growled Carlos, as he followed after Clara, who obeyed St. John's imperative gesture.

The ghastly thing hanging from the rope remained the sole occupant of the deserted hall.

CHAPTER XVI

THE DEATH OF VICTOR ST. JOHN.

YADAK, having heard the command, "Let him who waits hasten to the rescue," glided from his hiding place and fled homeward to the house of the fortune-teller, and ere many minutes had passed stood before Mario.

"Speak! What news!" demanded Mario, who had stripped off the counterpart of Beuditto's, or rather his daughter's disguise.

"The youth we captured has betrayed us," said Yadak. "He did not warn my noble mistress of every test, and she is a prisoner."

"A prisoner! No worse, Yadak," cried Mario, whose features, undisguised were full of nobility, though careworn.

"No worse, my master, but so bad that my noble mistress bade me hasten to the rescue," replied Yadak, who then rapidly related all that had passed.

"Now hasten to the house of the wine-seller, Paul Amar," said Count Mario, after hearing the recital. "I will write to tell him that his daughter is in the power of Victor St. John—the saloon is not far from here and I will await your return"

"And the youth who betrayed my noble mistress?" asked Yadak.

"Is dead."

"Ah! That pleasure should have been my reward," cried Yadak.

"What pleasure?" asked Mario writing.

"The pleasure of vengeance upon the traitor who attempted to betray my noble mistress to death, and did betray her to captivity," replied Yadak.

"He died in attempting to escape from the room in which we confined him," said Mario. "Doubtless he knew that the test would ruin my daughter, and fearing our vengeance sought to escape. He forced his way through a window, but in leaping to the ground must have lighted upon his hands and

knees; for hearing a groan I hurried into the yard to find him in that posture—dead. Take this letter to Paul.”

“But what killed him?”

“He had fallen upon a heap of old iron, and a rusty spike had pierced his breast—he died instantly and lies there now. But hasten to the wine-seller.”

Yadak hurried away, and was soon in the presence of Paul Amar and Henry Allison, who sat in the almost deserted saloon awaiting the hour of midnight.

Yadak gave Mario’s letter to the wine-seller, who read these words:

“Follow the bearer. Rosetta is the captive of Victor St. John. Benditto.”

“Ha! Good news!” cried Paul, leaping to his feet. “Benditto is a true friend. Come, Captain, the game is nearly up. We will call on Col. Hartly on our way.”

Within a few minutes ten well armed men, picked from the patrol force by Capt. Allison, were on their way to the house of the league, and with them went Allison, Hartly, Count Mario and Yadak.

In the meantime St. John with Clara and Carlos had entered the room occupied by Viola, Rosetta and Marbel.

As the lofty figure of the captain of the conspirators strode into the apartment, Rosetta, now conscious, recoiled from him in horror and clung to Viola’s arm.

“I have brought you a companion, fair ladies,” said St. John; “not a man as her garb declares, but a woman who has played the spy and been detected.”

“Do you still love this man?” asked Clara, approaching Rosetta.

“Love him! I loathe him—hate him—the black-hearted traitor!” exclaimed Rosetta, flashing utter abhorrence upon the Captain.

“So! I told you how it would be,” said Carlos. “Now being heart-free, my sweet Rosetta, will you love as good a man?”

A glance of terror was Rosetta’s only reply.

“It matters not,” growled Carlos. “You are to be Madame Lollio whether you love me or not. Time flies, Captain. Just hint to her how the wind sets.”

A long pause ensued, during which St. John paced the room moodily. He believed that Carlos had commanded his

desperate band to await his egress from the house, or he would have shot him then and there. But such an act would ruin his own plans for the men of the swaggering ruffian were devoted to their leader, and would doubtless soon be clamoring for admittance to the house, or betray the league in blind revenge if Carlos was injured.

The other conspirators had not had time to reach their various stations or St. John would have given the signal for sacking the city at once.

Little cared the villain for the fate of the miserable and betrayed Rosetta, but it galled his pride to be forced to yield to his despised inferior.

"Make haste, noble Captain, or I must take my bird by force," growled Carlos.

"I see no help for it," thought St. John. "Yet I can rescue her from this brute within an hour. I must appear to yield. Within fifteen minutes the fugitives will all be at their stations—I will then give the signal and the first man I slay will be Carlos.

Fearful agony was depicted upon the pallid face of the unhappy girl, as she watched the features of her betrayer. She thought it was pity for her that restrained him from completing his base compact; but he, heartless villain, was held back by pride alone.

"I have waited nearly ten minutes," cried Carlos, drawing his cutlass. "I will wait no more. Rosetta, you are my prize, and death to him or her that comes between me and my rights!"

"Oh save me—save me!" shrieked Rosetta, falling upon her knees before St. John. "Oh do not let this dreadful deed be done! Ah Victor—you, whom I have adored—you, who have ensnared me—you, who won my love to betray me—have mercy—mercy, Victor! Save me from *him*! Save me, and I will forgive you for all! for all, Victor! See! he comes nearer—save me!"

"Back!" exclaimed St. John, as his sabre clashed with the cutlass of Carlos.

"Ha! you will resist," roared the maddened Spaniard. "Then, blood of my life, I will turn traitor—states-evidence, and dance at your hanging before daylight."

"Stay! What sum will you accept for this girl?" demanded St. John.

"What sum? Shall I not be as rich as you, if the blow is struck? You would offer me gold when I have but to wait to roll in it! You are a fool, Captain. But there is something I will take in place of Rosetta," said Carlos with a glare of malice.

"Name it, and take it?"

"You swear to give it?"

"I swear."

"Then give me Viola!"

"Dog! you will drive me to kill you!" exclaimed St. John, springing towards the ruffian with upraised sabre.

But Carlos, who knew his might was as glass to iron against the powerful Captain's attack, folded his arms and said:

"Strike! Kill! I shall be avenged. You forget that my men await me. You forget that the time is nearly past for my presence among them. Strike, if you wish to die the death of him there."

He pointed through the open window at the body of Shiel.

St. John shuddered and lowered his weapon.

"Take Rosetta and begone at once, or I shall change my mind," said he sullenly, and turning to leave the room.

"Ah Victor!" cried Rosetta, clinging to his knees, "Do not—do not betray me to that monster! I will be your slave, Victor—I will be anything, Victor—but spare me from his horrible touch! You cannot—you will not—say you will not, Victor!"

St. John looked down into the tearful eyes of the girl—she was little more than a child—and grew ashy pale with emotion. He wavered for a moment, but catching the scowling glance of his enraged Lieutenant, bent down and whispered into Rosetta's ear:

"Go with him, and fear nothing. I will rescue you within five minutes. I swear it by the life of my soul, Rosetta!"

The unhappy girl gazed upon his pale and earnest face long and searchingly, but the time when she could trust in his faith had fled forever.

"Alas! I cannot trust you again, she sobbed. "No—let me die here—slay me, Victor, rather than give me to him—that bearded, abominable outlaw!"

"Ho! We are complimentary," snarled Carlos, advancing a step, "Come, we have had more than a double ration of this. Wet up."

He grasped her arm but she sprang from his touch with a shriek of horror.

"In the name of humanity, Captain St. John," said Viola, throwing her arms around the trembling Rosetta. "I pray you heed the heart-broken prayer of this unfortunate child, whose love you won. Are you a man to refuse her this poor boon?"

"Say that you, Viola Hartly, will give me all your love if I spare her, and, as I am a living man, were this Carlos a thousand instead of one, I will set Rosetta free, or protect her here," exclaimed St. John, darting a glance of hate, scorn and defiance upon Carlos.

"She is too noble to lie, and I am not base enough to desire to live at such a price," said Rosetta, drawing herself erect, and with the dignity of a queen. "If I must be sacrificed I will die at your feet, Viola—die here—baffling these demons with this, the last act of my life!"

As she spoke these last words she sprang towards the open window, desperate and swift in her resolve to cast herself headlong upon the floor of the hall, many feet below.

But for the rapid pursuit of Clara, till now a silent spectator, Rosetta would have succeeded.

"Not yet, Rosetta," cried Clara, clasping the girl in her arms. "We will try one more plea, and if it fails use this." She slipped a broad-bladed dagger into Rosetta's hands. "A scratch from that is almost instant death—for the blade is poisoned. Now St. John, or Le Grand, or devil, for you are all three, I dare you to refuse to protect this girl."

"*You* dare?" sneered Captain St. John.

"Ho! ho! *she* dares!" shouted Carlos, combing his great beard. "Well, sometimes a hen crows and then it thunders!"

"I dare," continued Clara, not deigning to glance upon the lesser ruffian. "Dare you to give your own daughter to this monstrous villain?"

"My daughter! Rosetta my daughter!"

"Come, this grows confoundedly interesting," said Carlos.

"Ask Paul Amar if Rosetta is not the child of Clara Antelli and Henri Le Grand?"

"My child—my daughter died!" gasped St. John, staring in dismay.

"So did I—you thought; but you see me alive," said Clara. "I will prove to you that Rosetta is our daughter."

but I must have time. I, her mother, own her mine. I dare you, her father, to give her to the brutality of that man.

She is armed—and look at her! she will slay herself at the father's feet if he refuses to protect her. And if he does refuse, I, her mother, will give her the protection of the grave."

With these words Clara snatched the dagger from Rosetta's hand, and held the keen blade near her daughter's heart.

"Raymond!" thundered St. John, springing to the door. "Raymond, hurry to the roof—fire the cannon—discharge the rockets—let the onslaught begin!"

"Ah! is that your game?" cried Carlos. "You will precipitate matters, and in the confusion cheat me, rascal! Captain."

"Cheat you, dog! Kill you as I would a snarling cur. Down with that pistol! I was not born to die by your hand."

"Now then, serpent!" screamed Marbel springing upon Carlos from behind, and binding his arms with her fierce grasp. "Would you shoot the Captain?"

"I will shoot *you*, old hag, if you do not loose my arms," snarled Carlos, struggling to free himself from the giantess.

"Will ye—yer vermin," said Marbel, seizing the back of his neck with her long, sharp teeth.

Carlos howled with rage, pain and surprise; this mode of warfare filled even him with terror.

"Raymond! Hurry, you scoundrel—to the roof! Fire the signal—haste!" shouted St. John, as Carlos struggled in Marbel's jaws. St. John would have rushed to the roof himself but for fear that some of his captives might escape.

Raymond was slow in coming, for he was finishing a flagon of wine below, and growled his discontent at the unwelcome interruption. Suddenly hearing the noise of the scuffle above, he hobbled thither, larding the way with curses.

"Hurry!" shouted St. John, as the ugly rascal appeared. "Fire the signal. Ah!"

He was thrusting his hideous face into the room, to learn the cause of the disturbance, as he spoke, and at that instant Carlos, having freed one arm, fired his pistol at St. John. The ball missed the captain, passed beneath his arm, and whistled through the Gorgon-head of Raymond.

The wretch spun around, clutching at the air for support, and then with a dismal groan, fell dead into the apartment.

"For that!" screamed Marbel, changing her bite to the throat of Carlos, and tearing out his beard and hair in a paroxysm of rage.

"Help! I stifle!" gasped Carlos, staggering beneath the weight and fury of the human tigress. "I yield—Rosetta—free—curse! She is tearing out my windpipe! Take it then!" he roared beating his heavy pistol upon Marbel's head; and as this availed but little he drew his knife, and stabbed her with a score of blind and desperate thrusts.

Dying she clung to his throat, uttering no cry, but making a horrid stifled noise, as she dragged him to the floor with her jaws fixed in his throat as rigid and relentless as steel.

St. John would then have rushed to part them had not he heard the crash of the front door below, and the heavy tread of many feet.

"Rosetta!" shouted a voice simultaneous with the crash.

"Ha! it is the wine-seller," exclaimed St. John. "We are surprised. 'This is your work, woman.'"

His hand was upon his pistol and his eye upon Clara when, even as he spoke came another crash in the League-Hall and with it the shout:

"Viola!"

"And Allison too," muttered St. John. "It is not too late—I will fire the signal and escape for bitter revenge!"

He sprang from the room, and as he leaped rather than ran towards the stairs which led to the roof, he heard another shout:

"Clara!"

"So—my lord, Count Mario!" thought St. John, flying up the steps and lifting the trap-door of the room with his strong shoulder. "I'll be even with you all."

He sprang upon the little platform he had built to sustain a single piece of cannon, and leveling his pistol at the vent drew trigger.

The pistol flashed in the pan without igniting the priming of the cannon, which had been protected from the damp of the night air by a wool-skin, and the conspirator hurried the faithless pistol far from him.

He had drawn another from his belt, when a dark shape seemed gliding towards him from the adjoining roof.

"Friend or foe, I must give the signal," muttered St. John, again drawing trigger.

Again the pistol failed, and at that instant the dark shape sprang upon the platform, the flash of the powder having revealed its features for a second.

"Yadak! Clara's foster brother," cried St. John, as the shape leaped towards him and upon him.

Yadak was the assassin, but he said nothing aloud as his strong grasp fell upon the conspirator's broad breast in a grapple for life or death. Yet St. John was a man of steel-like muscle, and as fearless as he was villainous.

Catching the armed hand of the Asiatic with his left, he grasped him by the throat and strove to strangle him at once.

"Dog! would you dare!" hissed the conspirator as his wonderful strength beat the man backwards, and crowded him against the railing of the platform. Yadak knotted his other hand in the conspirator's cravat and returned the fierce throttle with interest, until each relaxed his grip by tacit and mutual consent.

The separation was but for an instant, yet in that time St. John had drawn his sabre, and with a loud cry of triumph met the second charge of his fearless enemy.

"Take it! Take it! Black hound!" cried St. John plunging his sword blindly about him, and sweeping its keen edge in rapid circles, for the darkness made his foe almost invisible. A moment after there was a fall and a deep groan. St. John stood victor, and his enemy lay motionless upon the platform.

The conspirator then seized the cannon with his strong hands, and using all his great strength dragged it across the trap-door.

"And now for flight," said he, stepping cautiously upon the roof. "Once in the street and then revenge. Strange that I hear nothing of the Leaguers! Where are those of whom Carlos boasted! Let me summon my own."

He paused upon the ridge of the slippery roof, and drawing his signal whistle gave forth its shrill and rattling note.

No response. All was still, save the fierce thumping of those in his pursuit, who had tracked him as far as the trap-door and could get no farther.

"They have fled at the first alarm," muttered St. John. "Cowards! were they staunch and true, all were well. I must fly and speed to the stations.

He started again; a loose tile made him stumble: he erred in regaining his footing; he stumbled again and his feet

slipped upon the slimy moss of the rotting and crumbling tiles, then used instead of shingles; he fell headlong, rolling over and over for several yards along the decayed roofing; something stayed his progress and he rose upon his hands and knees to begin his ascent to the ridge above. Slowly, and by inches, he crept along until he reached an opening in the roof. He saw that opening glide from him, as if going upward. He comprehended his situation in an instant; he was upon a great mass of tiles which were sliding slowly down—the opening was not retreating; he was being carried away from it by the sliding mass to which he clung. He heard the clatter and crash of the tiles below him, as the mass forced them from the eaves to be shattered upon the stone yard below.

His hair rose on end, and his heart almost ceased to beat. Was there no escape from this terrible avalanche which was bearing him to certain and horrible death. He glanced towards the platform above: he would have given all earth to stand there though a hundred Yadaks should throttle him. The eyes of his foe seemed visible amid the darkness—nothing but the eyes, fierce, glaring, triumphant, mocking, abhorrent!

All the vile deeds of his life of successful villainy rose before him, and the pale faces of his many victims loomed up from the pit below—all dead and reproachful faces—above them all, one unearthly, demoniac visage, the blasted visage of the evil one whose willing slave he had been! Years, centuries, ages were crowded into seconds—one vast and limitless cycle of utter despair! All his gay and golden dreams of love and ambition shattered by a miserable tile! an insignificant atom of earth which he had scorned as he trod! All gone, lost—and bitter death grasping his hair to drag him to the hell in which he had never believed until then!

He felt the mass upon which he clung, creep over the fearful eaves, inch by inch, line by line, his feet first went over—the tiles that had supported them fell crashing to the stones below. He shrieked then! At last the monster felt the awful pangs of bodily fear! The desperado became a coward, and howled his terrors with shrill cries for help, which became hoarse and terrific as his knees glided into space.

He heard a mocking laugh even then—a laugh like his old sneer of malice and triumph. He glanced towards the platform, to see nothing, for the darkness was almost palpable,

but to hear that laugh again. It was Yadak, recovered from the random blows which had prostrated him—Yadak, who could see in the dark as well as a cat or a ghoul. Then a flash of light illumined the platform—Yadak had removed the cannon from the trap and men rushed up with torches. St. John cursed in helpless agony as he saw Count Mario pointing out his fearful fate to Allison, Hartly and Amar. He raved as the face of Clara, his wife, arose from the trap. But he saw nothing of Rosetta—of his child, of the daughter whose heart he had stolen in the garb of a lover, and crushed with the atrocity of a devil.

One movement more and he would be a mass of shattered flesh and bones! and as he plunged over backwards those who watched his fate, saw his old look of scorn and haughty defiance flash from his clear and eagle-like eyes, a smile of iron derision curl his proud lips. They heard his last shout of daring pride, and then they gazed in awe upon the empty space, and heard with trembling the crash that told,

VICTOR ST. JOHN WAS NO MORE!

CHAPTER XVII. THE CONCLUSION.

PAUL AMAR had been the first to rush into the room of the captives after St. John's precipitate flight.

The half-crazed wine-seller bounded into the apartment, with his lips thrilling with the name of Rosetta, and as he saw her his glance met his.

"My father! Dear father! she cried, springing into his arms. "Oh, will you forgive me, father?"

"Not until that scoundrel is dead at my feet," exclaimed Paul, with a bitter curse, and flashing his fierce eyes in search of St. John.

"Seek him upon the roof—haste!" cried Clara: "or he will work our ruin yet."

At the sound of her voice, Paul stared at her wildly.

"A woman—dressed as a man—in my nephew's garb! Who are you?"

"Pursue St. John! For your life, slay him ere he can give the signal," cried Viola.

"What signal?" demanded Paul, still staring at Clara.

"The signal for the firing and sacking of New Orleans!"

"Ah!" roared the wine-seller, turning to pursue the conspirator, and meeting Henry Allison, as he rushed in, sabre in hand.

"Viola! you are unharmed?" cried Henry, as she sprang forward to meet him.

"Unharmed, and happy now," replied the noble girl. "But follow Paul—pursue St. John!"

Henry needed no second bidding, and sprang after the wine-seller in hot haste, passing Col. Hartly and Count Mario, as they rushed into the apartment.

"You are safe, my child?" was the mutual exclamation of both, as one embraced Clara and the other Viola.

"Follow your friends!" exclaimed Viola, and the fathers hastened from the room, followed by several of the patrol who had accompanied them.

"For the mercy—of—Heaven!" groaned the strangling Carlos, in Spanish, as he withered in the death grip of the giantess. "Help! Ah!—horrible."

"He deserves the death," said Clara, with deliberate calmness, while Viola and Rossetta hid their eyes from the terrible scene. "We are powerless to rescue him—and if it were otherwise, I would not stir a finger to save him. But let us follow our friends—we do not wish to *see* him die."

Clara hurried away, and the maidens followed, clasping each other's hands, and not daring to look back upon the dreadful and appalling glare of the staring eye-balls of the justly punished ruffian.

The trap-door which opened upon the platform was held down by the weight of the cannon which St. John had dragged upon it at the very instant Paul and Henry arrived at the foot of the ladder leading to the opening; for several moments had passed before they could find the way in the darkness. Nor did they, until Henry stumbled over a pile of rubbish, and falling against a door, found himself in a small closet where a spirit lamp was burning, left there by Raymond for firing the signal. A bundle of prepared torches lay near, and the whole party seized and ignited them.

The torches had been prepared for the firing of houses; they were used to reveal the fate of the chief conspirator.

Finding axes at hand, Henry and Paul cut through the trap-door and its hinges, so that it fell inward, leaving the cannon resting upon the edges of the opening.

Paul was first upon the platform, and was immediately followed by all save Viola and Rossetta, who had no desire to ascend when Paul cried out:

"There he is! The tiles are carrying him over the roof! He is a dead man this minute! How he stares!"

Rossetta clung to Viola with a shudder. She had loved; ah, how devotedly, a few hours before, and though that love had been violently changed to detestation, could she so soon unconcernedly hear that he was perishing? And was he not her father!

She sobbed her anguish upon Viola's pitying bosom, while those above her held their breath until the fierce and defiant shout of the conspirator pealed upon the ear—and then a fearful crash.

"All is over!" exclaimed Paul. "And now, Rossetta,

“forgive you,” he continued, as he descended the ladder. “Come, let us look after those fighters in the room below. Come, Rosetta.”

The party were soon in the late prison, but Carlos was dead—dead, with his throat still in the unrelenting jaws of the corpse of the giantess. The hideous form of Raymond lay cold and grim as he had fallen.

“We have no more business here,” remarked Colonel Hartly. “We must take our daughters home, while measures are pushed to crush the accomplices of these miserable wretches.”

“Those accomplices will not act now,” said Clara. “They will await the signal, which will never be given.”

“The conspiracy will die with its leaders,” remarked Capt. Allison, “for as we broke into the house, a man sprang from beneath the steps with the cry—‘All is up! Jackson’s troops are upon us!’ and escaped in the darkness. Doubtless the relief has spread, and by this time the conspirators are hiding themselves with no thought but of safety.”

“Before we part,” said Count Mario, “I have one question to ask of Paul Amar. And I abjure him by every holy name to speak truly.”

“I will not lie, Benditto!” replied the wine-seller.

“I am not Benditto. *She* was Benditto, the fortune-teller,” said Mario, as he laid his hand upon Clara’s shoulder. “By means of artful disguises and great personal resemblance, which we increased by every means in our power, we two have for many years passed as one. I am Count Mario di Antelli, of Florence. This is my daughter, lawful wife of him who was called Henri Le Grand in Florence, and Victor St. John in America. Now answer me truly, Paul Amar—Is this maiden, Rosetta, your daughter?”

“I will not lie—for her mother seems to have risen from the grave to claim her. Rosetta is not my child—though who are say that I have not loved her with more than a father’s love?” demanded Paul.

“No one will deny it, my friend,” continued Mario. “And doubtless she has given the love of an affectionate child to you.”

“No—he was too noble to be my father—yet I loved him—love him now—will always love him,” sobbed Rosetta.

“My sweet child,” said the wine-seller, kissing her and

pressing her to his bosom. "Our love makes us father and child. Do not ask me," he continued to Mario, in Italian, "who her father was—for it will be barbarous to mention his name in her presence. She is your grandchild, Count Mario, and her mother in this lady."

He took a cloak from a sofa near, and threw it over Clara's shoulders, his eyes beaming with innate nobility, as he continued, in English: "Your dress distresses the eye, my lady, and with this cloak to hide it, and such a face above it, Rosetta will be proud to call you mother."

"My mother! Is she my mother, in truth?" exclaimed the bewildered Rosetta.

"She is, my child, and doubtless you will learn to love her as you did my poor Rosetta, and this lady will love you as she whom you have always called your mother ever loved you," said Paul, with tearful dignity.

"I will—I do," said Clara, drawing Rosetta to her bosom and passionately embracing her. "Have I found you at last my long lost Clara?"

"Let her be called Rosetta," exclaimed Paul, "that she may not forget one who fulfilled a mother's duty so nobly."

"She shall," cried Count Mario. "And now tell us how she fell into your hands."

"First tell me how you learned that my true name was Francis George?" demanded Paul, respectfully.

"Very simply," said Count Mario, smiling. "I witnessed your duel with the Captain of Lancers—I was the surgeon who accompanied him to the field of combat—for I have assumed many disguises during my search for Henri Le Grand."

"But those phantoms—that of the Emperor—and the duelling scene?" exclaimed Paul.

"As a fortune-teller and wizard, replied Count Mario, "I have a numberless variety of such things in order to meet ever kind of inquiry from the superstitious, and every phantom of my creating is summoned by its peculiar and fixed signal—by glance or gesture from me to my concealed assistants. A magic lantern can work wonders at times."

"I see," said Paul, shaking his head. "There are no ghosts after all." He then continued seriously, in Italian, that Rosetta might not understand:

"Le Grand poisoned his wife at a time when you were in Florence—or rather when you—whom I have never seen until

this night—were reported dead in France. I, among others, was called in to look upon the supposed dead body—I shall never forget the features of the poisoned lady, as she lay upon the floor, to all appearances dead. Her child, a mere infant, was smiling and prattling over the unconscious mother. All knew that the woman had been poisoned, and by Henri Le Grand, her husband—for ere she sank into supposed death she declared that he had poisoned her with an orange, and he fled from Florence to escape the vengeance of the law, as she retained her senses long enough to denounce him. I knew Le Grand well by sight, as one of the most extravagant and reckless gamblers in the city. He was called *The American Lord*, and had no friends, though many satellites.

The relatives of the poisoned lady refused to take charge of the little child, from fear of the anger of Count Benditto, your exiled brother, and then the supposed inheritor of your estates. Many, too, said the marriage of Le Grand and Clara Antelli was a sham or a falsehood; and the little child was about to be placed in an institution of charity, when I resolved to adopt it. I was then travelling back to France with my young wife—we had lost the only child God ever gave us—and my wife, Rosetta, seconded my resolution. The lady was declared dead, the child about to become an outcast upon the bleak charity of the world, we had no time to lose—for I had been recalled to France—so we took the child and were on our way to Paris with it, not more than five hours after the mother was pronounced dead. I did not even tell my name to any one in Florence, during my brief sojourn there, for I had lodged in a small hotel, and was simply designated as ‘the French soldier.’ We adopted the child, and I named it Rosetta, the name of my wife. When I fled to America, my wife and adopted child came with me. We never heard from Florence after that short visit. I saw Henri Le Grand—we called him by another name here, you know—I knew him instantly when I saw him, the first time after many years, three months ago, in my saloon; and you may imagine how I trembled lest some unfortunate chance might betray my secret to him. Therefore I never allowed him to suspect that I had ever seen him before. When Col. Hartly hinted to me that Rosetta loved that man, I was almost struck dead with horror—for I knew he was her father! I knew no way in which to get rid of him and preserve my Rosetta to myself, than be

killing him. For if I had told him she was his daughter, he would either have scouted the tale, or taken her from me. Now you know all."

"May Heaven bless you as I thank you," said Clara, grasping the hand of the honest wine-seller. "I recovered from that seeming death the day after your departure, and to my half-crazed inquiries for my child, received but one answer, '*The French Soldier took it.*' What French soldier? There were hundreds of French soldiers in Florence, going and coming. I had no clue to guide my search, and fell at once into the belief that Henri Le Grand had bribed some one to steal his child for him. My father returned to Florence a few weeks after, and hastened to console me. We wept in each other's arms and vowed revenge—vowed to devote our lives to its pursuit. So we left Florence, accompanied by Yadak, who stands wounded but happy there, and wandered over all Europe in pursuit of the atrocious father of my child. My uncle, Count Bendito, and my brother, Lord Conrad di Antelli, sought him also. Ten years ago, they were lost at sea. My father recognized Rosetta the moment he saw her, from her great resemblance to me, at the only time when I—many years before—openly defied him to his face. I did not recognize Rosetta, though often seeing her at your house; for my child's face was in my soul, the sweet, soft face of an infant. We are slow in finding a resemblance to ourselves in the face of others, and I never dared to attempt to think how I looked in my girlhood.

Rosetta must some day learn something of this dark story, but for her sake, much shall be concealed. As for her love for that evil man, it will soon be remembered with a shudder—a mere girlish passion—fierce while it lasted, but as ephemeral as unfed fire. Let Rosetta return to your home now. To-morrow we will determine upon the future."

All soon after left the house where so much evil had been plotted and baffled, and all were soon at their respective homes.

But in the yard of that house, upon the damp and bloody pavement, lay a stark and mangled corpse; a human ruin, terribly shattered and brainless, half buried beneath a mass of tiles, brick and mortar, with its once proud and handsome face crushed to a hideous horror, and its superb mould of form bent, broken, distorted and disjointed—its evil soul fled from earth forever.

So died the haughty Victor St. John. And the conspiracy died with him, for his genius and daring had been its life. And when the sun went down upon the next day, the soldiers of Britain thought not of crying "*Beauty and Booty*" over the bodies of their defeated Generals, but fled like frightened deer from the face of Andrew Jackson, the Hero of the Battle of New Orleans!

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WHEN the news arrived, a few weeks later, that America and England were at peace, Captain Henry Albson led Viola Hartly to the altar, and his mother, ill no more, saw the realization of the dream that had cheered her feverish slumbers.

Count Mario, Clara and Rosetta, and old Valle', with Paul Amar, were there; and at the gay marriage feast that night, our friend, Annette, was chief of cooks and vigilant over all. Her only remark, when she heard of the death of Louis Dufau, was:

"He's dead—and I shall never know what became of those spoons!"

Henry and his bride soon after sailed for Florence to become the guests of Count Mario, his daughter and Rosetta. And with them went Yadak and Paul Amar, leaving the young gallants of the Crescent City to sigh over the departure of the heart-free and now light-hearted Rosetta, the Wine-Seller's Daughter, once so nearly the victim of

"*The Conspirators of New Orleans.*"

